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by Seven Anderton

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ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

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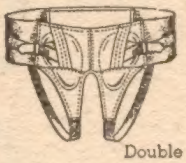

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THE REAL WEST

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EARLY WESTERN FOODS

by Lauran Paine

ARCHEOLOGISTS, or whatever you call those snooping individuals who roam the earth poking their businesses into other people's privacies, have often poked and pried into the ageless pueblos that are tucked away in the silent and deserted canyons of the great Southwest.

Occasionally these fellows find half-petrified little pieces of ancient Indian cookies, we would call them, but to the mysteriously vanished races of thousands of years ago, they were slices of bread.

Assuming that your own curiosity about the daily diet of the Anasazi, (old ones), is sufficient to warrant an experiment in ancient Indian cookery, the following recipes will give your palate a sample of what prehistoric cookery tasted like.

Pinon bread, the staple food of Southwestern Indians for hundreds of thousands of years, was made by taking equal portions of pine nuts and corn, grinding these together in a metate by hand until they resemble a roughly fine powder like flour; wrap tightly in a wet corn husk and tie at both ends with narrow strips of corn husks, much as modern Mexicans do their tamales, and bake in a bed of coals covered with earth.

Naturally your corn husked bread rolls should be close enough to the

[*Turn To Page* 8]

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coals to cook through but not so close that the coals will burn the outer covering and scorch the inner bread.

When the bread is cooked, which can easily be ascertained by any woman's instinctive knowledge of these things, take it out of the fire and eat it as is, or, like the later generations of cliff dwellers did, with a crude form of blackstrap molasses poured over it.

Almost everyone is familiar with the term, 'jerky', or pemmican. This meat was the Indian version of stored and preserved winter meat. Since they lacked home freezers and other preservatives it was difficult for the Indians and their white contemporaries of the plains to store enough food ahead to eliminate the necessity of constant hunting forays.

However, the Indians developed one source of nutrition that is acknowledged to this day as one of the most nourishing and wholesome foodstuffs on earth. This is jerky.

To make jerky it was customary among the old ones to employ antelope, deer, buffalo or upon occasion, bear meat. The meat is cut into thin strips, the thinner the better. The strips can vary to suit individual taste, but they should be at least a foot long and not more than three or four inches wide. The thickness of the jerky is the secret of making it good. In thickness jerky shouldn't be over a quarter or three-eights of an inch through. If it is any thicker it will be moist inside and will not cure properly.

Take the jerky strips that you have cut, probably out of beef nowadays unless you have been buck hunting, stretch a wire or a rope about five feet off the ground and make it secure on both ends to a tree or what have you. Hang the jerky strips over the rope and build a small fire underneath them. Keep the fire going until the meat is completely dehydrated. Of course, you'll want to salt and pepper the jerky liberally before stringing it up over the fire.

The smoke cured jerky will look like the shriveled up jockeys off of that old saddle Uncle Ned left out in the snow all winter, but they won't taste at all like it. Once cured, store your jerky in a cloth bag somewhere where you can easily get at it and take a strip or two with you when you go out. It's amazingly filling and tasty.

Another way to cure jerky is to lay the strips on the sloping roof of the barn under the blazing noon day sun and leave them there until they are thoroughly dried and dehydrated. This latter system is and was quite common in the arid regions of the Southwest.

Now you have created the major courses of a prehistoric Indian meal. Not a ceremonial meal or a feast of celebration, but the everyday meal of the everyday original Westerner from thousands of years before Christ up to quite recently. But the Indian, too, liked a little sweet something or other to wind up his meal with so he improvised piki.

PIKI IS STILL used by many blanket Indian families and is surprisingly agreeable to the taste. To make piki you take the blossom of the cacti and squeeze it for the coloring agent it contains. Many different buds, flowers and plants were pulverized to get red, green, blue and many other colors. After storing the coloring in an earthen jar, the old ones would heat rocks over a small cooking fire until they were too hot to touch. This was the forerunner of the frying pan.

While the little fire was working away at the undersides of the flat rocks, the Indian housewife would make a thick paste of ground corn and primitive sugar cane. She would stir and knead the elastic dough until it was thoroughly mixed, then she'd add what ever coloring took her fancy, sometimes using several different blends or colors to create merry little earthen pots full of bright colored dough.

[*Turn To Page* 130]

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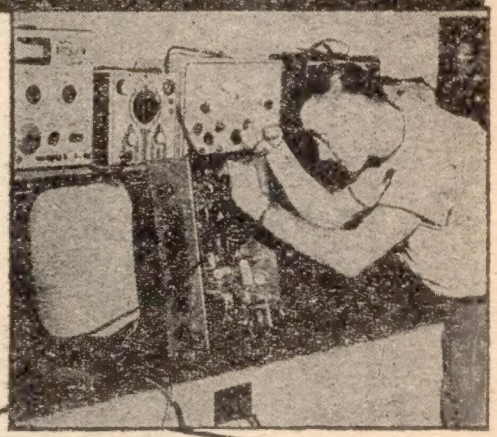

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The dog held the snake at bay, as Egan drew his gun, and waited for the rattler's head to come up.

"These ranchers are good men. They endured hardships and fought their way to establish themselves in this basin. Why—what has happened to them that they do not fight to keep what they've won?"

"They have children now," Egan replied. "Fighting an enemy who attacks in the open and faces you is one thing; fighting bullets from ambush, and attacks from masked gangs that fire your buildings and run is another. That sort of thing, over a period of years, wears down the best of men."

Then the unequal balance in the basin was suddenly tipped by a

CYCLONE IN PETTICOATS

Feature Novelet

by Seven Anderton

A BIG LEAN shaggy dog, traveling with the tireless lope of a wolf, had followed the lumbering stagecoach since sunup, when it left the railroad town of Redstone. It was nearly ten o'clock when the driver pulled the stage to a halt where the trail skirted a large spring-fed water hole. Northward, southward and eastward, gently rolling plains stretched to the horizon. To the west a high, rugged and sparsely timbered moutain range rose abruptly.

The dog bounded up and stood waiting expectantly as the driver climbed down and opened the door of the coach.

"Here's where you climb on shanks' mare, Egan," the driver said. "Rest of you folks got fifteen minutes or so to get out and stretch if you want to—while we water the hosses."

Nine passengers alighted. Three were women. One was the man the driver had addressed as Egan. He was a couple of inches more than six feet tall,

big-boned and lean almost to gauntness. His face had the apperance of having been carelessly hewn from brown rock. The big nose slanted slightly to the left and large ears stood out. Surprisingly blue eyes were set deep beneath shaggy brows which like his hair were a shade darker than his bronzed skin. Mr. Egan was no beauty —nor was he arrayed to impress.

A gray Stetson of the nine-gallon variety and a .45 Colt belted about his flat waist was Egan's only concession to the standard garb of the cattle country frontier. Instead of boots, he wore high topped and low heeled black leather shoes laced with rawhide thongs. His loose fitting trousers were tan corduroy. His faded gray flannel shirt was open at the throat and he wore no neckerchief. That was the extent of his visible wardrobe and all of it was well worn. As the dog moved close, Egan patted its head with an outsize hand. He was buckling a neatly made up back about his wide shoulders when one of the female passengers approached and spoke to him.

She was young and possessed of more than ordinary vivid brunette beauty. She wore quietly expensive garments that set off her beauty well. Her small but sturdy form was that of mature womanhood. She had the air of one who knew her way around: neither bold nor shy—just confident.

"Mr. Egan," she said, "if it's a fair question, why are you leaving the stage here?"

Egan shrugged his shoulders to settle the pack straps. "I'm goin' to Wet Basin, ma'am," he replied.

"So am I," she told him. "But I understand it is still more than a hundred miles away."

"It is—by the stage trail, ma'am," he replied. "But it's only six miles from here across the range. Howsomever, a mile and a half of that is straight up and another mile and a half straight down."

"I see," she said. "And when will you reach Wet Basin by walking?"

"'Bout sundown, ma'am, I figger."

"And this stage won't get there until tomorrow night," she said. "I think I'll go with you, Mr. Egan—if you don't mind."

"I mind, ma'am," he said crisply. "I mind plenty. The scramble over Black Range ain't no trip for a lady. It'll make *me* hustle to get over her by sundown. You stay with the stage."

Taken aback by his flat and gruff refusal, she was unable to find words until he was striding away toward the first bluffs that climbed to the range, the dog trotting beside him. Then, looking after him with dark eyes flashing, she spat a word that young ladies of that period were not supposed to know. It brought a chuckle from a pudgy commercial drummer.

"What are you laughing at, fatty?" she snapped at the drummer. "You watch me. That conceited gangleshanks is going to get a surprise. 'No trip for a lady,' he says. Lady! That is becoming a nasty word in my dictionary." She climbed quickly into the coach.

When she reappeared a few minutes later she had changed her elegant kid slippers for sturdy flat heeled walking shoes and discarded her pert little bright feathered hat. She ran to where the driver and the gun guard were watering the horses and thrust a five-dollar gold piece at the driver. "This will pay you to see that my baggage gets safely to Wet Basin," she said. "I'm going over the mountain with that human scarecrow you called Egan."

The driver started to protest. "You can't do that—"

"You, too!" she cut him off hotly. "You men make me tired. You just bring my baggage to Wet Basin. I'll be at the hotel."

She was off at a running walk and the driver looked questioningly at the gun guard.

"Let her go," the guard advised. "She's free, white—and of age, I reckon. Bones Egan will get her over that

hump somehow—but I feel sort of sorry for Bones."

The driver grinned. "Dunno 'bout that. She's right prime lookin' she stuff. Was I Bones, might take me a week or so to get her over that range."

EGAN WAS approaching the foot of the first bluffs when he became aware that she was following him. He looked back when the crack of a whip on the still air announced that the stage was resuming its journey. He swore with feeling when he saw her less than a hundred yards away and coming almost at a trot. The dog looked up at his master and whined once, softly.

"Sure a hell of a note, Lance," Egan growled. "Old Chad Lyman must be plum loco to let her take out after us." He stood waiting with his wide mouth set grimly.

"Ma'am," he snapped as she came up, "you're as crazy as a bedbug. You can't climb that range alone in a week —and I ain't got time to fool with you. You better—"

"I'm going over that range," she cut in,, "so save your breath. I'll not bother you. I wouldn't even stay in sight of you—only you evidently know the way. I'm as able and as smart as you are. I can go as far and as fast as you can. Just start on, Mr. Egan. I'll stay well behind you."

He looked exasperated as he scanned her small erect figure and stubbornly set face.

"You'll stay right *close* behind me," he said. "I don't want to tie you there until I have to. Mebby you're too smart to learn anything more, but you'll have a chance. You stay right behind me—and don't gab. You'll need your wind."

He turned abruptly and strode into an eroded cut that ran down the face of the bluff. The dog trotted ahead of him. She followed at several paces. In that fashion they climbed upward for half an hour. He cast an occasional glance over his shoulder, but said nothing. Neither did she. The still rising sun grew warmer and both climbers perspired. The ascent was steady —at times steep—although Egan was choosing a route through gulches and ravines that avoided the roughest going. The timber was not heavy, but brush and vines grew all about.

Then the dog stopped a few yards in front of Egan and stood with hackles raised and a growl rumbling in his throat. Egan halted and the girl almost bumped into him as he put out a hand.

"Where, Lance?" Egan said, eyes on the dog.

Lance began to move warily into the sparse bracken. Then the thin air was torn by that sound which once heard is never forgotten or mistaken for any other—the whirring buzz of a rattlesnake. The dog took one more cautious step forward, then a twisting sidewise leap as the reptile struck. Like a black dart, the snake missed the agile dog narrowly, measured its length on the rocky ground and instantly coiled again. As the triangular head lifted again from the mound of coils the gun in Egan's hand spat and the bullet all but obliterated the head. Then the diamondback, rattles still buzzing, was threshing in its death throes.

The dog's hackles lowered and he stood watching alertly. Egan holstered his gun and turned towards the girl. "There," he said, "is one reason why only an idiot would start over this range barefooted."

"I'm not barefooted," she snapped.

His eyes dropped to the five inches of silk stocking between her shoetops and the gray skirt. "Not quite," he said dryly.

She looked past him at the still jerking body of the snake. "Have you a knife?" she asked. "I want those rattles."

He gave her a sharp look, then took a clasp knife from his pocket and flipped it open. There was a challenge in his eyes and the faint quirk of his lips as he held the knife out to her.

"Thank you," she said, taking the knife. She stepped past him and looked down at the dead reptile.

"About eight feet long," she said. "He was a beauty."

"Beauty?" he said.

"Yes," she replied. "Have you ever noticed that a snake is the only living thing that cannot possibly assume an ungraceful position? Then she stooped, grasped the rattles and with one firm slash, severed them from the body. She counted the rattles.

"Fourteen and a button," she said as she thrust them into a pocket of the skirt and turned to hand back his knife.

He took it, wiped the blade on a trouser leg, closed it and put it back in his pocket.

"Lets get movin'," he said. "Come on, Lance."

He strode away down the defile they were traversing, the dog again ranging just ahead. She followed close behind, dark eyes on his stiff, flat back. A peculiar smile twitched her lips for a moment.

AS THE SUN neared the zenith they were still toiling upward. Once they passed through a narrow crevice between cliffs not more than three feet apart at some points. Egan was setting a pace that was calculated to wear her to a nub, but she lost no ground. Her lips were set in a firm line. Then as they climbed along the floor of a ravine among the ridges they came to where a spring bubbled from the rocks. Egan had purposely swung wide, intending to pass the spring. He knew there was another an hour or so ahead. It would do the little smart aleck good to get thirsty.

But the dog betrayed him. Lance dashed suddenly through the brush and began lapping thirstily at the water in a pool formed among the rocks. Egan strode on without a backward glance, but the girl followed the dog.

"Now who's an idiot," she called after him. "Come on back and get a drink. You'll need it if you're going to keep trying to wear me out."

Egan turned back—a little sheepishly, although he was frowning. When he reached the pool she was on hands and knees, drinking. He lay prone on the opposite side of the pool and did likewise. When he rose and wiped his mouth with the back of a hand, she sat regarding him quizzically.

"What makes you so mean?" she asked.

"Mean?"

"Yes, mean. If I were a man you would have been glad to have company and—"

"But you ain't a man, by a long shot," he cut her off. "And that's another thing that shows you ain't as bright as you figger."

"In your superior male reasoning," she flared, "simply being a woman proves that I must be at least slightly feeble minded?"

"No," he retorted, "but followin' a man you don't know from Adam off into these humps was a long ways from bein' bright. Suppose I was to—well, get fresh?"

She glared at him for a moment in silence, then sprang to her feet. Her dark eyes flashed. "And you accuse *me* of idiocy," she raged, "standing there without the guts to even say what you mean! You're saying what if you were to rape me, but you shy around the good plain word. Big strong man! Don't you know the man doesn't live who can rape a woman as

long as she is conscious and really doesn't want him to? All right, Mr. Egan. I'll just bet you a hundred dollars you can't do it. Start trying!"

Her pose, her expression, every line of her was belligerent— even pugnacious. He surveyed her soberly for a moment and his rough hewn face seemed to struggle against a smile. Then he shook his head.

"Nope," he said. "I ain't got the hundred dollars and it's always been my notion that what you just said is a fact. But s'pose I was a feller that didn't care whether you stayed conscious or not?"

"Do you think for a moment," she retorted hotly, "that I would have started over these mountains with you if I hadn't known you were not one of those? I am not an idiot, your opinion notwithstanding."

"And just how did you know that about me?" he inquired.

"Mr. Egan," she said, "My father was a construction engineer—one of the toughest and best. He told me about men—and we worked together from the time I could remember until three years ago when he was killed in a rock slide on the railroad. When I was eight years old I was water monkey on one of his jobs in Missouri. I earned five cents an hour lugging water up and down the job to keep the gang from killing time going after it. I worked up to be his timekeeper and straw boss. On some of the railroad jobs we worked as many as three hundred men. I handled them—and I never got raped." She pulled up her skirts and snatched a wicked bone handled stilleto from the top of her stocking. "I know men—and I carry this for the kind who don't care whether a woman is conscious or not!"

The grin struggled through far enough to soften his rugged face slightly. "Um," he said. "Well, let's move on. It's a tol'abe piece yet to Wet Basin. And you stay close behind me—not on account of the rattlers. One that bit you would probably die from it anyhow, but I don't want to have to go back too far after you when you play out."

"Then you *would* come back after me?" she asked as she fell in behind him.

"I'd go back after a tuckered sheep," he growled. "And sometime when I git a hundred dollars to spare I think I'll call that bet of yours. Now shut up and save your wind."

SHE MADE no retort, but smiled speculatively at his pack laden back. An hour of silent climbing later he halted on a ridge and glanced back at her.

"This is the top," he told her. "Most of the way on is downhill, but don't get a fool notion it'll be easier."

"I've hiked over mountains before," she retorted.

A half hour later they came to the second spring. As they approached it the dog's growl warned of another snake. It was dispatched as before. This one was not so large—perhaps three feet in length. After drinking of the cool water, Egan pointed to the needle carpet under a conifer.

"Set," he said. "We've made good time. We can take a little blow here."

"I'm not tired," she said, "but I would like to talk a little."

"Wimmen allus do," he said.

Her dark eyes snapped. "All right, misogynist. We learn things that way. Evidently you never try it. Since you haven't asked my name, I'll tell you anyway. I'm Ruth Horn. And what are you called besides Mr. Egan?"

A gleam crept into his blue eyes and he picked up his g's and abandoned the easy, sloppy speech of the frontier. "For obvious reasons," he said, "I am most frequently referred to as Bones—and on most occasions addressed as Doc."

Wonder and something else mingled in her expression. "Oh," she exclaimed, her eyes widening. "You're a doctor?"

"Veternarian," he said. "Hoss Doctor is the term in this locality, al-

though I assure you I have no prejudice against other animals."

"You're an educated man," she accused. "You can speak perfect English. Why the jargon you have been using?"

"Suits me better," he replied, slipping back into it, "and makes folks I deal with like me more. Just figgered I'd show off a bit when you tossed misogynist at me."

"You *are* mean," she declared.

"Mebby," he said. "But a person that don't clutter up the understandin' of common folks with highfalutin' fifty-cent words gets along a lot better."

She was regarding him with aroused interest. "What college, Dr. Egan?" she asked.

"None," he replied. "My paw was a hoss doctor and likewise done some school teachin' when there wasn't too many sick critters around. Paw had book learnin'. Left me a passel of books. Some of 'em had been grandpaw's. I sort of studied around between the big words and—"

"Stop it," she snapped. "I think you are a lineal descendant of Ananias."

She saw his grin blossom fully for the first time. "Never traced no further back than Baron Munchausen," he said, "and it's—"

"Never mind," she stopped him. "I'm not going to ask you any more questions until I learn to tell when you're lying. Are you honestly a veterinarian?"

"Like a woman," he observed. "Make a promise and break it with the next breath. I sure enough doctor sick critters. This pack I'm totin' is medicine and instruments that I went to Redstone to get. We better move along now. It's quite a piece yet to town—and it might rain."

The dog had crept close and she was scratching gently behind his ears. She looked up at the clear sky in which the sun shone brightly.

"Rain?" she said skeptically.

"If you stay in Wet Basin long," he said, "you'll find out why that's its name. Let's go."

He turned away and the dog sprang up and darted ahead of him. She rose and followed. The timber on the western slope of the range was large and grew more thickly. After another hour of descent they crossed a shallow ravine and climbed to the top of another ridge. There he paused and indicated the view that had opened.

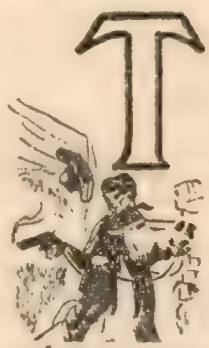
"There's the basin," he said.

Before and below them at the foot of a long and not too steep slope the basin lay level and verdant—stretching away for miles. Dim in the haze beyond it rose the snow capped peaks of the Rockies. At some distance from the foot of the slope a small town was visible. A bank of clouds were rolling up above the horizon to the south and west.

"It's beautiful," she cried softly. "So green and fresh!"

He nodded. "And that batch of clouds means rain. There's a cabin down at the bottom, 'bout a mile and a half from here. We'll have to hustle if we make it before she cuts loose."

2



THE ROLLING clouds had covered the sun and the first big drops began to fall when they reached a small but snug cabin that had been erected as shelter for wood cutters. They covered the last hundred yards at a run. A minute after they were inside the totally unfurnished cabin, rain was furiously hammering the hand split shingles.

"A weather prophet as well as a doctor," she said as they looked through the open door at the downpour. "I apologize. How long will it last?"

"Not more than an hour," he replied. "You see now why it's named

Wet Basin. By some quirk of nature and geography it rains like this once in every eight or ten days. The basin is a pocket about seventy miles long and fifty wide pushed up between this stray range and the Rockies. The country all around is desert, including the lower end of the basin. Just the upper half of that gets these rains that turn six thousand square miles into the finest range and farming land that lies outdoors."

"Sounds like a little Garden of Eden," she said. "I'm glad I came."

"Why did you come?" he asked. "I've been wondering if I shouldn't have let a diamondback bite you. This basin has trouble enough already."

Her eyes narrowed, then a smile tugged at her lips "Why do you think I'll make trouble?"

"You could do it," he replied, "by just looking like you do. And besides that you have a disposition like a proddy steer. Why have you come to Wet Basin?"

"I had a good report on its possibilities," she replied. "Do you know Leslie Holbrook?"

He nodded. "Feller that opened the new bank in Wet Basin six weeks ago."

"He is my uncle," she said, "and the only family I have left since my father died."

"Um," he grunted. "Jumpin' before lookin' evidently runs in your family."

"Why do you say that?" she asked sharply.

"You'll see," he said darkly.

"You tell me," she said. "Has Uncle Les made another mistake?"

"He got a habit of makin' them?" he countered.

She sighed. "Yes. He has a natural bent for recognizing opportunities, but he never seems to know what to do with them afterwards. Perhaps he dreams too big. He is my mother's brother. In the past my father has staked him to funds for one undertaking after another—but none of them have worked out. What's the matter with this one?"

"Basin ain't big enough for two banks," he replied. "Not yet anyway. And Holbrook locked horns with a slick and tough customer by the name of Milt Hastings that has been runnin' a bank and about everything else in the basin for ten years. Holbrook ain't goin' to last long—and he'll probably lose his shirt."

She looked troubled. "But the basin *is* prosperous?"

"Could be," he said, "wasn't for a number of things."

"Tell me about those things," she said. "I may be able to help Uncle Les more if I know about them."

He stared out into the rain which had settled down to a steady hammering. She sat down on the dusty plank floor and looked up at him as she waited.

"One thing," he said, "is the way the basin is cut off from everywhere else by the desert and the Black Range. It's a hundred and twenty-odd miles to drive cattle around the south end of the range and back up to the railroad."

"Cattle are driven much farther than that," she said.

"Not without water," he said, "and not when men get killed and the cattle rustled on the way. Nobody but Grant Biddle ever gets a drive through to the railroad. He makes it through all right—and there's a sidewinder around somewhere, but nobody can pin it down. Anyhow, it works out that Biddle is the only feller in the basin that makes any real profit off cattle."

"How does he manage that?" she asked.

"Buys up all the cattle that get ready for market," Egan explained. "Pays about half what they'll bring at the railroad, then drives them down to his Circle B ranch on the south edge of the green country. When he gets a thousand or so on hand, he takes his crew of gunslingers and pushes them around to Redstone."

"Without water?"

"No. From Biddle's place to Sampson's Point at the south end of the

range is forty miles. There's a little lake there, formed by the flow from springs in the mountains. He waters there, and rests the stuff for about fifty miles of dry drive again to that waterhole where we left the stage. Then from there to the railroad. A tough drive and rough on the stock, but it pays Biddle plenty. Folks figger he clears mebby six dollars a head."

"Why can't the other ranchers do the same thing?"

"They used to try it. But somewhere around Sampson's Point they would run into a bunch of renegades. Good men would get killed and the herd would be hustled south. It's only sixty miles from Sampson's Point to the border—and there's water along the way after the first half. Two years ago the ranchers bunched up and drove a big herd with eighty some men to guard it. That didn't work either."

"Why not?"

"They got to Sampson's Point all right." Egan said. "But the little lake had been salted—plenty. The thirsty herd pushed to the water and tanked up. Nearly half of them died right there—more on the north. About a third of the herd got to the railroad—in bad shape. Last year everybody sold to Biddle. What little they made on the cattle went to pay on what they owed Milt Hastings' bank."

"Biddle got the cattle to market all right?" she asked.

"Yep."

"That has a very bad odor," she observed.

"Ain't the only stink in the basin," he said. "Come on. Rain's over and it'll be supper time 'fore we get to town."

THE RAIN had stopped as suddenly as it began. The sun, now low in the west, was already trying to break through the tattered clouds. They set out across the soaked sod side by side, the dog now trotting between them. Half an hour brought them to the end of Wet Basin's single street. The little town lay rain washed in the warm glow of the descending sun.

"Uncle Les wrote that he was staying at the Basin Hotel," she said.

"Right yonder," he said. "The two-story building. Best place to eat is Maggie Mason's restaurant right next door. Your uncle may be there now." He chuckled. "You and Maggie ought to hit it off. You're a lot alike."

She gave him a questioning glance, but he did not explain. The street was deserted at the supper hour, but a man was standing on the wide porch of the hotel as they came up.

"Hello, Doc," the man said, tossing away a cigaret butt after his eyes had surveyed Ruth Horn with appreciation. "You got too late fer the excitement. Bunch of masked hombres rid into town jist after dinner and robbed the new bank. Killed Holbrook."

The purveyor of news stopped speaking and looked puzzled as Egan spun away from him to look at the girl. A little gasp had come from her and she stood rigid, staring at the other man. Egan reached out a big hand and touched her arm.

"Steady, Miss," he said.

She shook off her rigidity. "I'm steady," she said, then with her eyes still on the other man, "where is my uncle?"

The man looked confused.

"This is Miss Horn," Egan explained to the other. "She is Holbrook's niece."

"I—I'm sorry, Miss," the man said. "I didn't know—"

"That's all right," she told him. "Where is my uncle?"

"Over in the back end of the furniture store," the man said. "They took him there—" He seemed at a loss for anything more to say.

"Just down the street," Egan said. "Shall I take you there?"

She shook her head. "There's nothing I can do for him—right now," she said. "And I don't need taking anywhere. I'm—very hungry."

Egan looked flustered. It was evi-

dent that females in distress were not his forte. The man who had broken the news went away after mumbling something that neither of them heard. "I'll take you to Maggie Mason," Egan said. "Her place is right here."

Maggie Mason's restaurant was busy. The long, low-ceilinged room was filled with the odors of good food. A long counter ran along one side and there were more than a dozen tables, covered with red and white checked cloths. The counter and more than half of the tables were occupied by men in rough work clothes or the garb of ranch hands. A Mexican woman of middle age and a young Mexican girl were waiting on the customers. Maggie Mason stood behind a cigar and candy counter near the front entrance.

Maggie was fifty, give or take a year or two. She lacked less than an inch of being six feet tall and weighed two hundred pounds, of which not an ounce was fat. Her square Irish face was florid and her simply done hair iron gray. Bare to above the elbows, her arms looked capable of bulldogging a buffalo. Her sharp blue eyes spied Egan and Ruth as they entered.

Egan pushed Ruth ahead of him and, behind her back, made a distress signal to Maggie. "Right on to that blue door in the back," he said to Ruth. "Maggie has a private dining room back there."

In the private dining room there was one table, covered with a white cloth and seating eight. Maggie entered a few moments after Ruth and Egan.

"Maggie," Egan said. "This is Miss Ruth Horn. Holbrook is—was her uncle. Spike Avery just told us."

Maggie looked at Ruth, then at Egan. She jerked a thumb at the door through which they had just entered. "You git, Bones," she said.

Egan got—looking relieved. Maggie's face softened and she spoke in a voice that boomed and still managed to be gentle.

"Glad to meet you, Miss Horn," Maggie said, "Set right down there—or would you rather go back to my parlor?"

Ruth smiled. "You're kind, but I'm all right. It's just that I heard the news so suddenly and am very hungry. I ate breakfast early and then walked across the mountains with Doctor Egan."

"Hell you did!" Maggie exclaimed. "I wondered how you got here. Ain't no stage today. You set down. I'll be back in a shake." She left the room by a different door, to return shortly with a tumbler of dark red liquid which she placed on the table before Ruth.

"You drink that, Miss," Maggie ordered. "It's a chokecherry wine that I made myself. Do you good. Hot vittles in a minnit."

HALF AN hour later Ruth had finished an excellent meal. While eating she had told Maggie in detail of her trek across the range with Egan. At times Maggie struggled to suppress laughter—in deference to her guest's bereavement. Concerning that, Ruth explained, "So I can't feel too badly about my uncle. I've seen him only twice in my memory, and only briefly then. I came here because he was the only relative I had left, and because what he wrote me of this basin

made me think there was opportunity here to do something worth while. Now, if you don't mind, I'd rather not talk any more tonight. I'm rather tired."

"And no wonder," Maggie said, "after followin' that long-legged Bones Egan across that range. You come right on back to my spare room and go to bed. Now don't argue. That boars' nest that some calls a hotel ain't no place for you. I'll call you any time after five o'clock in the mornin'."

Ruth smiled. "I think seven will do."

Two hours later and near Maggie's closing time, Bones Egan sat at the counter drinking coffee and talking to Maggie who sat on a stool beside him. They were alone in the place, the help having been sent home for the night.

"Now I've heard both sides," Maggie told him, "and I'm swiggered. One thing sure, you met up with your match in that gal. How come you never mentioned backin' down on that bet that you couldn't rape her while she had her senses. You didn't mention that."

Egan's face turned red. He didn't answer. Maggie chuckled. "You know," she said, "was I a certain able-bodied hoss doctor I'd take on that proposition. Might be worth the money. I'd even put up half with you, just to watch the fracas."

Egan grinned at her. "You old hellion," he said. "Do you think it could be done?"

"Hell no," Maggie declared. "It couldn't even be done to me—old and feeble as I am. But jist tryin' it on that gal ought to be worth the money. Listen, Bones, if you got a lick of sense you'll get yourself a suit of store clothes and honey up to that one. Right now she thinks you're lower'n a snake's belly in a wagon track, but some soft soap and a little pettin'—"

"I'd rather pet a bobcat with a bellyache," Egan declared.

"There's goin' to be a lot of gents around here think different," Maggie said, "soon's they clap eyes on her. Was I you I'd manage to git up to the front of the line."

"She'll probably go back east where she belongs," Egan said, "now that her uncle has been killed."

Maggie shook her head. "Says not. Goin' to settle down here."

"She's crazy," Egan declared, "there ain't no place here for her."

"Strikes me," Maggie said, "like the kind of gal that could make one if she takes a notion. She's gettin' up at seven o'clock, in case you should want to happen around in time—"

"I won't," Egan cut her off. "I'll be startin' up the basin at daybreak. That medicine I packed back is needed quick on a lot of ranches."

"There is sure a screw loose," Maggie declared, "in a yahoo that can keep his mind on cow-critters in these here circumstances."

3

FOUR DAYS passed, during which Ruth Horn's uncle was buried in the town's forlorn little cemetery and Ruth took charge of his looted bank and his possessions at the hotel. After going over all papers and records she could find, she went about the town asking questions of all and sundry, including Milt Hastings, owner of Wet Basin's other bank.

Ruth agreed to continue her occupancy of Maggie Mason's spare room only after Maggie agreed to accept rent for the accommodation. During that transaction, Maggie remarked that the Basin hotel was no place for a lady.

That brought an unlady-like snort from Ruth. "That word annoys me, Maggie," she snapped. "Does a woman *have* to be a lady just because she's decent?"

A grin spread across Maggie's square face. "Think I know what you

mean," she said. "Mebby there ought to be a new word. Howsomever, a female has three choices. She's got to be a lady, or a chippie, or a old battleaxe like me. Menfolks has decided that."

"Damn men," Ruth exclaimed. "How about being a young battleaxe?"

Maggie regarded her thoughtfully for a moment. "You want my honest opinion, you *could* be one. But it ain't much of a ambition. Very few men got nerve to marry a battleaxe."

"I'm not interested in marriage," Ruth retorted. "Men and their superior attitude! I'll make my own way in this world."

Maggie nodded. "Wouldn't be s'prized you did—one way or another. But take a old fool's word, you're ridin' for some hard bumps. You talk to me whenever you need to. I hope we're goin' to be friends—and I've had a lot of experience at paddlin' my own canoe."

After that Maggie and Ruth had long talks between each supper and bedtime. During their last one before Ruth was to leave for Redstone on the morning stage, Ruth told Maggie of a plan she had formed and meant to carry out as rapidly as possible. It delighted Maggie and worried her at the same time.

"You got enough money for all that?" Maggie asked.

"You're not to mention a word of this to anybody, promise?" Ruth countered.

Maggie promised.

"My father," Ruth told her, "left me quite a bit more than a million dollars."

Maggie stared and shook her head. "Beats me," she declared. "With all that money, why do you want to mess around this blasted basin?"

"I want to *do* something," Ruth replied, "and I don't believe there's a place in the world that needs something done."

"Reckon not," Maggie agreed. "But it still beats me. All I can say is you *better* be a battleaxe if you go through with such shenanigans."

●

Bones Egan came back to town three days after Ruth Horn's departure. He had ridden at least two hundred miles during his week of visits to ranches scattered over the basin. It was past ten o'clock and Maggie Mason was just closing up for the night when he entered her restaurant.

"Hello, sweetheart," he said as he grinned at her and draped his lanky form over a stool at the counter, "Got a quarter of beef or somethin' like that left over?"

Maggie snorted. "Hell of a time o' night to come huntin' grub. Why don't you learn to suck cows if you're goin' to live with 'em?"

"Now Maggie," he said, 'is that a way to greet a weary and starving pilgrim who—"

"Dry up the blarney," she snapped, but her eyes twinkled. "I'll get you some cold taters and chunk of roast."

"No pie?"

"You're lucky to get anything," she flung over her shoulder as she went into the kitchen.

But he got a big steak, potatoes, coffee and a quarter of an apple pie. Only the pie was cold.

As he began eating Maggie leaned on the counter and said, "Just get to town?"

"Uh huh. What's been goin' on?"

"She left." Maggie replied.

Egan chuckled. "Figgered she would."

"Just on business," Maggie said. "Left her stuff here. Paid three months' rent on my spare room. 'Be back in a couple of weeks,' she said. And when she comes, this town's goin' to think it's been hit by twin cyclones."

"How come?"

"You'll see. Are you goin' to get some decent clothes that don't stink like a danged steer?"

"What for?"

Maggie sniffed. "Whilst she was here, all the young bucks and a lot that got sudden notions that they was still young bloomed out in glad duds like a lot of rainbows and a lot o' rust got wore offen razors. Didn't none of 'em make any ground, but that wasn't your fault. Bones Egan, you need a wife to look after you and make you into a human bein' and this maybe your last chance to get one with spunk enough to do the job."

Bones sighed deeply. "I know I'm beginnin' to dodder, darlin'. But I been figgerin' you and me would get hitched as soon as you got old enough."

Maggie snorted. "I ain't takin' no kid to raise."

"Maggie," he chided, "you're inconsistent. Comes of bein' young beautiful and female, I guess. What sort of devilment is the Horn wench plannin', provided she don't change her mind and not come back—let's hope?"

"You'll be surprised," she said.

"Probably. Can I have some more coffee?"

SEVENTEEN days had passed and it was May when Ruth Horn returned to Wet Basin riding beside the driver of the lead wagon in a train of sixteen. All the wagons were drawn by mule teams and a dozen more mule teams were being led. Canvas covers were lashed over the heavily loaded vehicles. Besides two on the seats, roughly dressed men rode atop several wagons.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when the caravan pulled off the trail to make camp at the east edge of town. The arrival aroused curiosity and speculation. Men dropped other occupations to watch the activities of the newcomers. Observing the proprieties of the frontier, they waited in front of the stores and in the *Nugget Saloon* for the strangers to come where allowable questions could be asked. But they waited in vain.

The only two to leave the camp were Ruth Horn and a stocky and husky man about fifty years old. Ruth's appearance brought grins and sotto-voice remarks from the watchers. She was wearing pants! Other women in the basin sometimes wore them—around home when they helped with outdoor work and no males except their own menfolk were around. But this was the first time in its history that a female had paraded pants down its main street. The pants were working overalls tucked into calf-high and sturdy-laced shoes. Above them she wore a shirt of quiet dark plaid, open at the throat and well filled by her full young breasts. Her dark hair was in braids wound snugly about her head and she was hatless. Her companion's worn and faded work gear was similar to hers and his weather beaten face was covered with half a week's grizzly beard. Hair of the same color showed below a battered felt hat. He carried his solid body on bandy legs and despite his apparent age looked like he might be plenty tough to handle.

The pair paid no attention to the watchers as they marched down the middle of the dusty street and into Maggie Mason's restaurant. It was nearing Wet Basin's supper time, but with interest centered on the camp making, Maggie's place was still devoid of customers. The two Mexican women were having coffee at the kitchen end of the counter.

Maggie came from behind the cigar

case to meet them as they entered. Her blue eyes sparkled and she grinned as she surveyed Ruth's wardrobe. "If you think you're disguised as a man," she boomed, "you're foolin' yourself. But you're lookin' good."

Ruth smiled. "This is my battleaxe suit. Maggie, this is Mike Halloran. He's boss of my father's old grading gang that I told you I was going to steal from the railroad."

Mike's whiskers were stirred by a wide grin. "Maggie, is it?" he said. "And a broth of a girrul as Swedes go. I'm thinkin' the other name would be Swanson."

Maggie's eyes flashed. "I'm glad to see you back," she said to Ruth, "but it's my duty to warn you again' association' with the likes of him, and—"

Ruth laughed. "Don't fight with him, Maggie. He likes it too much. And Mike, you behave or go back and eat from the chuck wagon." Then to Maggie. "I've been promising Mike one of your good meals and we're ready for it now."

"'Tis probably lutefisk," said the still grinning Mike.

"Seein' the lug is with you," Maggie said, "I'll feed him. But take him back behind so's my genteel customers won't be annoyed."

When they were seated at the table in the private dining room and Maggie had gone into the kitchen, Ruth scolded, "Mike, if you don't behave, Maggie will put salt in your coffee—and it will serve you right."

Mike chuckled. "Herself is a fine figger of a woman, I'll be bound. I'd be drinkin' a bit of her salt, would it be makin' her happy."

Maggie served them with a bountiful and well prepared meal, family style, and they had assailed the food when she brought in the coffee. After a final glance over the board, she pulled out a chair and sat down. Mike Halloran swallowed a mouthful of spare ribs and cabbage with evident relish and observed, "'Tis a thorn betwixt two roses I find meself—and fed like a king. A rare feast for the stummick and one more elegant for the eyes. Astonished I am that a scandihoovian lass—"

"Stop it, Mike," Ruth snapped as Maggie bristled. "Maggie, has anything that I should know about happened while I've been away?"

"Roy Bostwick from the Cross B ranch was in the other day," Maggie replied, "Asked about you and said he had a thousand dollars borrowed from your uncle. I told him you'd be back and he'd hear from you."

Ruth nodded. "I found his note."

Silenced, Mike Halloran picked up his coffee and took a swallow. His eyes brightened and widened as they went to Maggie, who was looking steadily at Ruth. Mike raised the cup again, then having drained it, popped his lips.

"'Tis a wonderful way ye have wid a cookstove, acushla," he declared. "I'll be thankin' ye for another cup of the elegant coffee—wid a dash more of the salt, if ye don't mind."

Ruth struggled between a smile and a frown as she looked from one to the other of them. Then the tip of her nose wiggled and she reached Mike's cup and sniffed. The bouquet of the brandy with which Maggie had spiked the coffee was robust. Ruth laughed.

"No more salt for him, Maggie," she said. "I want him sober tonight—for a very good reason."

When the meal was finished Ruth said to Halloran, "You go back and see that the camp is all set for the night, Mike. Then come back here about eight o'clock, after supper is over and we can have a talk with Maggie."

"I'm thinkin' I could do better wid Maggie," Mike suggested slyly, "widout the swate presence of yourself, mavourneen."

"I think you've done well enough," Ruth said dryly.

Mike left, chuckling.

"I'm surprised at you, Maggie," Ruth said, smiling.

"Wouldn't s'prize me," Maggie said, "If there was consid'able man behind

them whiskers and rags. 'Minds me of my father when I was a tyke."

"What *was* your name, Maggie," Ruth asked, "before you married?"

"Dugan," Maggie replied, grinning.

4

RUTH WAS looking over papers and making some notes at the table in the dining room when Maggie entered at half past seven. A neat gray dress of gray material, lisle stockings and kid slippers had replaced the overalls, shirt and boots. Maggie surveyed with approval.

"Most of 'em have et," she said. "Maria can handle it now. You have sure got this town bustin' with curiosity. I know a lot more'n the others, but I'm bustin', too." She sat down across from Ruth.

Ruth pushed aside her papers. "You know all I can tell you, yet," she said. "I'm just carrying out the plan I told you about before I left. I've made a deal with Mike and his crew to do the work in the range. Everything has gone all right so far. The next thing I have to do is find a man—an honest man who knows all the ranchers in the basin—to do some work for me. How about that Roy Bostwick who borrowed from my uncle?"

"Roy's a good man," Maggie replied, "What sort of work you want done?"

"I want somebody to ride over the basin and give a message from me to every rancher. I'll pay well—"

"Bones Egan," Maggie cut in, "would be a lot better—"

Ruth's disdainful sniff stopped her for a moment, then she went on, "You strike me as a smart girl, but ridin' your high horse about Bones is plum foolishness. You want help, don't you? And for what you just said you wanted there ain't nobody near as good as Bones. He rides all over the basin every week, doctorin' sick stock and tellin' the ranchers what to do to keep 'em from gettin' sick. The ranchers swear by him and—"

"And," Ruth snapped her up, "if I ask him to do what I want done he'll start giving me advice—and tell me what I'm going to do is no job for a lady."

"Trouble with bein' a battleaxe," Maggie observed, "is bein' a battleaxe. Molasses catches more flies than vinegar. You're headin' for a mean scrap, gal. You'll need all the friends you can find, and you wouldn't have to try very hard to make one outa Bones Egan. Smart, Bones is, and knows more about this basin and the folks in it than any other three fellers. If I was you, I'd be smart and ask Bones to take this here message to the ranchers. Also, I wouldn't wait for him to offer me advice. I'd ask him for it."

Ruth shrugged, "Perhaps you're right, but the superior Doctor Egan makes me so damn mad."

Maggie nodded. "I recollect," she said, "how Bill Mason aggravated me somethin' scandalous from the minnit I met him. Kept it up, too, until I finally married him to put a stop to it."

"And that stopped it?"

Maggie shook her head. "Hell no. Bill went right on bossin' me when I needed it and soft soapin' me at other times—and I wish to God he was still here doin' it. But about Bones. He's out front eatin' his supper and I asked him to stay around for a while, 'cause I might want to see him."

Ruth suddenly relaxed and laughed. "All right, Maggie," she said. "You can ask him to come in. But don't get the idea that I'm going to marry him to stop him from annoying me. Come to think of it, he said you and I were a lot alike. Why don't you marry him yourself?"

"He don't aggravate me, much," Maggie said, grinning, "but he easy could—was I thirty years younger." She rose and moved toward the door

to the restaurant proper, then paused and said, "Now don't make a tarnal fool of yourself and offer to pay Bones for takin' your message to the ranchers. Bones does anything for a la—'scuse me, battleaxe, he does it as a favor. And mind this, tell him about this scheme of yours and ask him for advice, 'fore he gets a chance to give any. A gal with your equipment hadn't ought to have to be told these things about menfolks. Comes o' bein' raised by one, I s'pose—with no mother to tell you better."

EGAN FOLLOWED Maggie when she returned a few moments later. He was dressed much the same as on the day Ruth had met him. He gave her a nod and a lop-sided smile of greeting. Before either of them could say anything, Maggie took steps to see that Ruth followed her advice.

"Miss Horn," Maggie said, "is fixin' to do a few things for the everlastin' good of this here basin. She's been talkin' 'em over with me and now she wants some advice from you on the best way to go about 'em."

Ruth stiffened, started to speak, then relaxed. Egan hung his Stetson on the corner of a chairback, drew out a chair for Maggie and seated himself.

"My advice doesn't cost anything," he said, "and that's probably more than it's worth. But I can hardly give it until I am acquainted with the nature of these beneficial undertakings."

Mischief gleamed for a moment in Ruth's eyes. "The hoss doctor," she drawled, "ain't talkin' right."

Egan's wide mouth twitched, "Plum careless of me," he retorted, "but most folks understand me good."

Maggie broke it up. "Tell Bones about your scheme," she urged Ruth. "Anybody can tell you how it's goin' to strike the basin folks, he can."

Ruth picked up a pencil and twisted it in her fingers. "One thing I'm going to do," she said, "is reopen and operate the bank my uncle founded."

"Figgered that," Egan said, "from the arrangements you made when you left. What I wonder is why?"

"We'll discuss that later," Ruth said. "I am also going to build a road across Black Range which will cut the distance from this basin to the railroad to thirty miles instead of one hundred and twenty. Then cattle can be driven to the railroad in one day, with no water problem."

The door opened as she finished speaking and Mike Halloran entered. Ruth introduced the two men, Egan rising to shake hands.

"Sit down, Mike," she said then. "Doctor Egan is the man with whom I walked over the mountain. I've just told him about the road. He is familiar with the easiest footpath. He hasn't said what he thinks of my idea."

"Been thought about before," Egan said. "Fellers in the basin have talked about it. You know it'll cost a heap of money? Or ain't you lookin' at it as a business proposition?"

"I have considered it as such," she replied. "By inquiry I learned that the basin produces some twenty thousand cattle yearly. Is that correct?"

"Pretty close."

"And could produce twice that number?"

Egan nodded.

"And do you think the basin ranchers would object to paying a dollar per animal for the use of such a road?"

"Nope."

"All right," Ruth nodded with satisfaction, "I've agreed to pay Mike Halloran and his crew sixty-five thousand dollars to build the road and they've agreed to have it ready for use on or before the first of October. Three years to return the investment and an income of twenty to forty thousand a year thereafter. Is that good business?"

"*Sounds* good," Egan said, then looked at Mike. "You been across the range, Halloran?"

"Not yit," Mike replied.

"Quite a job to tackle sight unseen," Egan observed.

Halloran grinned. "Fer the price you heard herself name," he declared, "me and the byes would be buildin' six

mile av road across the slag heaps av hell, if herself wanted wan there."

Egan's eyes went back to Ruth. "Did you tell Mr. Halloran that there would be other trouble than just the problems of cutting a road?"

"You tell him," she invited.

"Herself," Mike spoke up, "told us there'd be spalpeens wid notions against. In yon camp wid the wagons ye'll find fifty av the best that ever swung a pick or a shillelagh or hoisted a jug of County Antrim potato juice."

Egan smiled. "Are they bullet proof?"

"They patch up aisy," Mike replied, "and—"

"I might tell you, Doctor Egan," Ruth interrupted, "that I finally got Mike and his darlings to leave the railroad by promising them there would be plenty of trouble. Several thousand Indians and quite a few renegade whites objected to the railroad—but the trains are running. Don't worry that Mike won't build the road, but you could—" she caught Maggie's warning glance and went on, "I would appreciate it if you could find time to show Mike the route you use in crossing the range."

"I wouldn't mind," Egan said, "because I'd like to see such a road. Has it occurred to you that that range is public domain?"

"Not any more," she told him. "Before we left Redstone my lawyers wired from Chicago that the government has granted me a deed to a strip two miles wide from the waterhole where you and I left the stage straight across to the basin. That should well take in the pass we followed."

EGAN REGARDED her with something like admiration. "You said something about my advice. So far you've told me that you are going to build a road and reopen your uncle's bank. My advice on both, not that I think it will carry any weight, is don't. But I'd still like to know why the bank? The road should stir up plenty of trouble to keep you happy, while you live."

"How much money," she countered, "would you say the people of this basin owe Milt Hastings' bank?"

Egan sat in frowning thought for several moments, then said, "At least forty thousand, mebby more."

"And they pay six percent interest?"

"Or more?"

"I have quite a bit of money that is earning less. I'm going to open the bank a week from Saturday. I will loan money to all citizens of this basin at four percent for the purpose of paying off Hastings' bank—and I'll take over their notes and mortgages. In addition, I will loan up to two dollars per acre on first mortgage to any basin land owner in need of funds."

Bones Egan gaped at her in amazement. "Hell," he growled. "Two dollars—even less—will *buy* nine or ten acres in the basin."

"Not after my road across the range is built," she said. "I looked into the resources and prospects of this basin before I decided on what I mean to do. And that brings us to another thing; Maggie tells me that you are the man to do what I want done—in order that the ranchers in the basin do not lose their chance to profit by the development my road is bound to bring. I asked Maggie about the qualifications of another man. She recommended you—highly."

Egan smiled at Maggie. "I'll do anything that I can," he said, "that will help the people of this basin." He waited, questioning her with his eyes.

"I want every rancher in the basin told what I have just told you," she said. "I want them warned against selling their land, because it is going to increase greatly in value before this year ends."

"Hm-m," Egan said. "I'm wondering about something. Would you mind telling me how much money you have, Miss Horn?"

Ruth told him. "And I can raise more, if necessary," she added. "But I don't want that to become known beyond we four."

"Then," Egan asked, "being a business woman, why didn't you buy up a lot of basin land at present prices before you started anything else. That would have been a lot better than any possible profit from a bank."

"Because," she replied, "I want to prosper *with* this basin—not *on* it."

"I like that," Egan declared, "and I believe it. But there's another reason behind all this. When I help with anything, I like to have a clear picture. Why are you picking a fight with both Milt Hastings and Grant Biddle. One at a time they wouldn't have been so tough, mebby."

"Pish," Ruth sneered. "It's all one fight and—"

"Ain't never been proved," Egan cut her off.

"Proven," she exclaimed. "Rot. It took me less than four days to know that those two work together. And you and the other people of the basin know it as well as I do."

"Knowin' and provin' is two different things when you get into court," Egan observed.

"This may never get to court," she snapped. "I know this. Hastings has operated a bank here for twelve years—and it was never robbed. Less than two months after my uncle opened a bank it was robbed and he was killed. He hadn't much capital. I know because my father supplied it. The bandit could have made a much bigger haul at the Hastings bank—but they robbed my uncle's, and killed him. That's why I'm reopening the bank. Before I'm through, it will be the only bank in Wet Basin. That much I can do to avenge my uncle's death—murder."

"If you live long enough," Egan said. "I'll say this for you. You don't care who or what you choose."

"Indeed I don't," Ruth retorted. "My father always told me to either pass up a job entirely or do it up right. I've taken on this one. Are you willing to carry my message to the ranchers or not? I want them to have it before the news that I am building the road gives anybody a chance to take advantage."

"I'll tell them," Egan said. "I'll start in the morning, and I'll get the first two I talk to started out to help. Every rancher in the basin will know in two days. Now tell me something else; where are you going to get the cash to handle the rush that will hit you when you open the bank?"

"I've got seventy-five thousand dollars in gold and silver in one of the wagons at our camp," she replied. "Also—"

"Damn it, woman," Egan exclaimed. "Who else knows about that?"

"Keep cool, doctor," she said, smiling faintly, "Nobody knows it but us and Mike's crew who have guarded it all the way from Redstone."

"And me byes," Mike Halloran spoke up, "are all close about it and sleepin' wid one eye open and one av Misther Colt's popguns ready to hand."

"Also," Ruth added, "the money is locked in a big new safe that it takes a dozen men to move. It will be taken into the bank in the morning before Mike's crew goes out to set up camp at the foot of the range."

"Holy Moses," Bones sighed. "Don't you know you're deliberately inviting trouble in the way you are going about this?"

"Certainly," Ruth replied. "If trou-

ble has to come, the sooner the better."

MIKE HALLORAN chuckled. "'Twas the daughter of Tim Horn ye just heard."

"Sounded to me," Egan said grimly, "like a bull-headed little idiot trying to commit suicide. Men who bowed their necks a lot less have died with a bullet in the back—or just completely disappeared from this basin."

"And you think such a condition should be tolerated?" Ruth snapped. "My father told me frequently that it was better to die on your feet than live on your knees. Tell me something, Doctor Egan. These ranchers are good men. They endured hardships and fought their way to establish themselves in this basin. Why—what has happened to them that they do not fight to keep what they have won?"

"They have children now," Egan replied. "Fighting an enemy who attacks in the open and faces you is one thing; fighting bullets from ambush and attacks by masked gangs that fire your buildings and run is another. That sort of thing, over a period of years, wears down the best of men."

"I'll not ask you what about the law," Ruth said. "Maggie and others have told me about that. There is no law, because Ed Stone, who is deputy sheriff here, belongs to Milt Hastings. But I will ask you this. Do you—does anybody in this basin—really believe these things you have mentioned are the work of Mexican bandits?"

"Some of them *could* be," Egan replied, "and there is the matter of proof. Remember that most of the people in this basin are honest and trying to be law abiding."

"Rats," Ruth snapped. "A child shouldn't be fooled. Why would Mexican bandits poison the water hole at the south end of the range? What could they gain? That cost money—and it was done to convince the ranchers of the impossibility of getting their herds around to the railroad. This man Biddle can buy cattle for a song, though, and never has any trouble with his drive. And that isn't because he keeps a crew of forty or more gunmen on his ranch and uses them to protect his drives. That—"

"So the basin folks know all those things," Egan cut in. "But bullets in the back—"

"Are among the things that are going to stop happening around here," Ruth declared. "First and quickly, I'm going to stop the source of income—so completely that if Hastings and Biddle want to fight about it they will have to expose their partnership. Then—"

"Did I hear right," Egan interrupted with a sour smile, "or didn't you say you wanted some advice?"

"I also asked for help," she retorted, "and I'll be glad to hear advice that will help in what I'm going to do."

"This would be funny," Egan said, "if it wasn't pitiful. What you want is a yes-man. I'm not it. You are a bull-headed female with too much money and just enough sense to be dangerous to yourself and everybody else. You could get a lot of good men killed—"

"But on their feet, I hope," she snapped.

"Or mebby in bed," he retorted.

"Then I take it that you won't take my message to the ranchers," she said.

"I'll tell 'em," he replied, "because they ought to know—and because you'd get the word to 'em one way or another anyhow. My way may do less harm than any other."

"And what is your way?"

"I'll skip Biddle, of course—and three-four others that toady to Milt Hastings or run off at the mouth with a few drinks in 'em. And I'll tell the others to keep quiet about any dealin' they figger on doin' with your bank, until they see things workin' out."

Ruth frowned, then said after a moment, "Perhaps that's just as well. But you will get my message to them—and give Mike pointers about the route of the road?"

"Said I would. Will you take some advice about that money you brought?"

"I'll listen."

"Deposit it with Milt Hastings' bank." Egan said, "until you open yours for business."

Maggie Mason's mouth fell open. Mike Halloran looked puzzled. Ruth Horn's brows knited for a moment, then she smiled a sort of Mona Lisa smile and her dark eyes sparkled.

"You like it?" Egan asked.

Ruth gave him a little salute with buched thumb and fingers. "I love it," she said. "I should have thought of it myself. I had a plan to as! Deputy Ed stone to guard the bank after I put the money in it. But yours is better. It will leave me with nothing to worry about while I help Mike get the road started."

"Sounds crazy to me," Maggie Mason said. "Even what little money I got I bank over at Redstone to—"

"I'll explain it to you later, Maggie," Ruth said. "Now I think we had better all get some rest. Tomorrow looks like a busy day."

"One more thing," Egan said. "Keep your new safe hidden in the wagon. Waiting for it to come is your reason for depositing the money with Hastings. Tell him you expect it in about a week."

Ruth nodded. "Of course."

"You intend to start your road tomorrow?" Egan asked.

"Pitch the camp, at least," Ruth replied.

"And I'll start early," Egan said, "to cover the basin." He stood up. "Come on, Halloran, I'll buy a snort. Be a good idea, I think, if we did a little talking in the *Nugget* about the road."

They did that. Then they walked down to the wagon camp where they talked for nearly another hour.

"I'm wid ye, Egan," Mike said at the close of the conference. "Herself is a bit headstrong and a bit av lookin' out for her will do no harm. Would ye be mindin' a bat of advice yerself?"

"No."

"Niver tell herself that she can't do anything," Mike said.

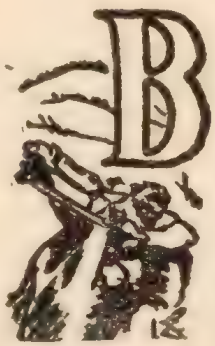
"Thanks," Egan said, "but I had already decided that wasn't a good idea. I'll be back in two days. I don't think anything will happen before then."

"That's a long time," Mike said, chuckling, "fer nothin' to happen—whin herself has her finger in the pie."

"I believe you," Egan said. "That's why I'm going to make what arrangements I can before I ride out in the basin. Remember, the room you want at the hotel is number six."

"I'll be in it," Mike assured him, "wid both eyes peeled."

5



BONES EGAN didn't get back to town until mid-morning of the third day following. He tied his rangy red roan saddler to the rack in front and went into Maggie Mason's restaurant. At that hour there were no other customers and the help was all in the kitchen. Maggie, with a frown on her square face and a stub pencil in her hand, looked up from where she was doing accounts at the front of the counter.

"It's about time," she snapped. "And you look like the wrath of God. Been sleepin' with cows, I s'pose. If ever a man needed a wife you're him. And you've got her interested—damned if I know how. If you're busted, say so and I'll loan you the price of a suit of store clothes."

"Bless you, sweetheart," he said, grinning, "but save your money for our honeymoon. I'll be a rich man when all the ranchers pay me with the money they're going to borrow from

the new bank. We'll go to Niagara Falls—"

Maggie snorted. "Wouldn't you be in a hell of a fix if I took you up. Ruth has been like a flea in a hot skillet all mornin', watchin' for you to show up."

Egan chuckled. "Stirred up some trouble she needs a man to handle?"

Maggie scowled. "If you're goin' to get anywhere, you better quit harpin' on that tune to her. She figgers she can do anything any man can do and—"

"Can she raise a crop of these?" Egan interrupted, fingering his tawny three-day whiskers.

"Can you have a baby?" Maggie retorted.

Egan's eyes twinkled. "I can raise whiskers without help."

"That's the hell of it," Maggie snapped, "and if you don't get busy and help her I'm goin' to bust one of your legs—right below your danged chin. If you had the sense the Lord gives a goose—"

"I get along," he stopped her. "What has Miss Horn stirred up while I've been away?"

"Ask her yourself," Maggie said. "She's over at Otto Wolff's print shop right now. She's goin' to start a newspaper here."

"That takes the cake," Egan declared. "Everybody hereabouts knows everything that happens long before it could possibly be printed."

"Shows how smart you are," Maggie retorted. "She's goin' to have a tellegraff wire run down here from Redstone, so the paper can print what's goin' on everyplace."

"Busy little bee," Egan commented. "Did she put her money in Milt Hastings bank?"

"Yep. And she told me why. I bet Milt is fit to be tied when she starts —there she goes now. Headed for your dump to see if you got back yet, unless I miss my guess."

Egan's gaze followed Maggie's out the window. Then he strode out of the

place. Maggie nodded with satisfaction and returned to her accounts.

Bones Egan and Ruth Horn reached the small log building that was his office and living quarters at the same time.

"Looking for me?" Egan greeted her.

"Yes. Have the ranchers all received the information that—"

"They have," he cut her off. "I've heard about your newspaper. That's a business proposition, too?"

"It certainly is," she replied. "I don't expect it to pay at first, but the *Wet Basin Record* will be a power in this state—"

"This is a territory," he reminded her.

"It will be a state," she said. "I look ahead—your opinion to the contrary."

"Hm-m," he said. "I'm beginning to wonder if you don't look so far ahead that you overlook where the next jump is going to land you."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I think I'll just let you see—and save argument." He opened the door and stood back. "Will you enter my castle?"

Ruth entered and stood looking about the small and littered room that was his office. Her nose crinkled.

"That's iodoform you smell," he said. "Does wonders for gangreen in wire cuts." He cleared a chair of bottles and a rope twitch and she sat down. He half sat on the corner of the battered table that served as a desk. "How's the road going?"

"All right," she replied. "Mike is hoping you can show him and a stake crew across the range tomorrow."

"Guess I can."

"You can arrange it with him tonight," she said. "He's staying at the hotel." She laughed softly. "Mike's got a case on Maggie. It's very funny. For the first time in ten years that I've known him Mike has shaved in the middle of the week. He rides one of the mules back and forth to have supper and breakfast at Maggie's."

Egan grinned. "Does Maggie respond?"

"She pretends she's annoyed, but she feeds him in the back room and puts whisky in his coffee. It's fun to watch." She rose. "Then you'll see Mike this evening. I must go now and write some letters. I'm going out to the road this afternoon. I've bought a saddle horse."

If it was a hint, Egan ignored it. She paused just outside the door to pat the head of the big dog, Lance, who wagged his tail all the way to his shoulders.

When she was gone, Egan filled and lighted his pipe, then went out and down the street to the *Nugget Bar*. Lance trotting beside him. When he emerged from the saloon some ten minutes later he was accompanied by a blond young cowboy. They moved down the street and entered the wide doors of Gabe Misner's livery stable.

THAT NIGHT after supper, Egan and Mike Halloran entered Mike's room in the hotel. A quick but warm friendship had sprung to life between the two.

"You better go easy on Maggie's coffee," Egan said, "or she'll have you sayin' something you can't back out of."

"Divil a back will I ever back from Maggie," Mike declared as he opened a dresser drawer and produced a square bottle of Old Bushmill's.

After both had sampled the pride of County Antrim, Egan said, "Your monkeyshines have served a purpose, at least. Miss Horn thinks you're staying at the hotel on acount of Maggie—or her grub."

Mike chuckled. "I'm hopin' this shenanigan won't last too long. 'Tis a bad example it would be for me byes, was they to find out I'm sleepin' under a bush whin I'm supposed to be out ahead linin' up the grade."

"I think there'll be action before long," Egan told him. "Hastings will do something soon, since he thinks Miss Horn's safe may be here shortly—and I think it will happen at night."

Mike nodded. "I agree wid ye."

"We'll be set for it," Egan went on. "I lined up a couple of ranch hands that can be trusted. One of them will be in the room next to you here and the other will be *sleeping* in the loft of the livery stable. I'll be at the window of my office, and I've fixed with a couple of other friends to cover the back of the bank. I've coached everybody on what to do. Remember, nobody is to be killed if it can be helped. Your camp guard is keeping on its toes?"

Mike nodded.

"And you took care of your dynamite?"

"Niver worry!"

"Then all we have to do is wait—and watch sharp. So I'd better go down to my place and do my part."

"D'ye think," Halloran asked, "Miss Ruth has no suspicion of this hanky panky we're lookin' out for?"

"I'm sure she don't," Egan replied. "And after we nip it I hope the result will make her a little more willing to leave the mens' jobs to men."

Mike grunted. "Ye are a hopeful cuss. Herself is fey wid the idea that she—"

"I know," Egan cut in. "but anything can be cured." He opened the door, said goodnight and was gone.

Mike Halloran rubbed his square chin, went to a closet and took out a Winchester rifle, drew a chair to a window, placed the bottle of Old Bushmill's on the window sill, blew out the oil lamp, raised the window blind

and sat down beside the open window. From this post he had unobstructed view of the front of the Hastings bank across the street.

It was on the following night that Bones Egan's carefully laid plans bore fruit. It was nearing three o'clock in the morning and the waning moon was sinking in the west. The town of Wet Basin had long since quieted down for the night. At his post beside the open window of his room, Mike Halloran was smoking his old cob pipe as he kept his vigil with eyes and ears alert. From another room in the hotel, from the open hayloft door of the livery stable and from the window of Egan's office four other pairs of eyes watched the front of the Hastings bank. From other vantage posts three wide-awake men kept equally sharp watch on the back door of the bank building.

The first warning came to the ears of the watchers. The still night carried the sound of many horses being ridden at a walk. The sound grew louder as a cavalcade of more than thirty horsemen moved down the dusty main street from its eastern end.

Lying on a blanket inside the open hayloft door of the livery stable, a blond young cowhand watched the dark mass of riders move along the street in the faint moonlight. Quietly he reached out a hand and awakened a man sleeping beside him. "Business, Bob," he whispered.

The other man stirred and his hand sought and found a rifle that lay beside him. The pair lay in the doorway and watched the group of riders pass, saddles creaking and the soft thud of hoofs the only sound.

Mike Halloran placed his pipe on the floor, left his chair and knelt at the open window as he thrust his rifle to rest across the sill. The sinister cavalcade moved past the hotel and was suddenly halted before the Hastings bank. By the dim light of the moon Mike could see the tall crowns of the sombreros worn by the riders.

A dozen or more of the riders quickly dismounted, leaving their mounts to be held by others who remained in their saddles. Then the dismounted figures moved swiftly towards the front entrance of the bank. As they crossed the plank sidewalk before the building Mike Halloran's cheek pressed the stock of his rifle.

Then the sharp crack of a gun ripped the silence of the night. The shot had been fired from the open window of Bones Egan's office. Seconds later four other rifles spat—two from hotel windows and two from the loft door of the livery barn. The reports clattered along the street and shattered the quiet of the night.

A man yelled sharply and fell to the sidewalk before the bank. Curses and cries of alarm came from the riders massed in the street. Then the night was split by the reports of other rifles from somewhere behind the bank.

Moments later the demoralization of the horsemen in the street was complete. From vantage points they were too rattled to locate rifles were spitting lead which was whistling about them and smacking into the front of the bank. Glass shattered and tinkled on the sidewalk as flying lead found windows.

A voice, without an accent shouted, "Come on, let's get out of here."

The men who had been moving towards the door of the bank picked up their fallen comrade and fled toward the milling and snorting horses. The eight rifles of their unseen foe continued a fusilade which felled no more victims, but added plenty to the bedlam. Then hoofs pounded the earth as the routed cavalcade raced down the street and out of the town in ragged disorder.

AWAKENED by the young riot, Ruth Horn was sitting on the side of her bed when Maggie Mason burst into the room, carrying a lighted

lamp. Maggie was wearing an old gray robe over her nightclothes.

"Get some duds on," Maggie said, placing the lamp on a dresser. "Sounds like hell is poppin' and it probably concerns you."

"You haven't got any on," Ruth said, shaking her head to dispell sleep.

"What I got on will do," Maggie retorted. "If I was to go out there nekkid nobody would get excited. You're different. Git somethin' on and let's see what's goin' on."

Minutes later Maggie and Ruth burst from the restaurant. Ruth had pulled on a pair of overalls that she had worn the afternoon before while inspecting the work on her road. Into the overalls she had stuffed her nightgown. The hubbub had quieted somewhat and several men were gathered before the Hastings bank. Two carried lanterns.

"What the hell is all the rumpus about?' Maggie Mason demanded as she and Ruth Horn reached the group in front of the bank.

Bones Egan stepped down from the sidewalk to meet them. There was a Sharps rifle cradled in his arm. "*Renegades,*" he said, "came to rob the bank. But they got a surprise." he turned back to the other men. "Mike, keep a tight guard. You know why. The other fellers will be covering the back door."

Moments later, having ordered Maggie and Ruth to move with him across the street, he said to Ruth, "I did a little looking ahead myself. Figgered it would be simpler for Milt Hastings to have his own bank robbed than to wait for you to open yours. So I set a trap. It worked. Now here is all you have to do to sink Hastings. He'll be showing up here before long —and he'll not be happy when he finds out that his bank wasn't robbed and that the crew that prevented the robbery has mounted guard around the bank. So you tell him that you want your money. Say you will feel safer with your own men guarding it. He can't refuse to let you have it—and he can't produce it."

"Why not," Ruth asked, "since the bank wasn't robbed?"

"Because I'm sure," Egan replied, "that the money—yours and Hastings' —was taken from the bank previously, and the robbery was to be just a noisy coverup."

"You mean—" Ruth began.

"Here comes Hastings now," Egan cut her off. "You just demand your money. See the other people coming. There will be plenty of witnesses when Hastings tries to explain why your money can't be delivered."

Aroused by the shooting, citizens of Wet Basin were now flocking to the scene. Some of the men were accompanied by their women. The men carried arms. Lanterns bobbed along the street like huge fireflies. Milton Hastings, Deputy Ed Stone at his side, came hurrying up. Hastings, a big man with the look of an athelete gone to seed, was fully dressed in an expensive business suit.

"What's happened?" Hastings demanded as he came up to the group before the bank. "Has my bank been robbed?"

Bones Egan stepped through the crowd to meet Hastings. "No, Milt," he said, "some fellers rode into town with that idea, but some of us that have been worried for fear that might happen was watchin' for 'em. They didn't get into the bank."

"They didn't," Hastings exclaimed, then after a pause, "that's fine. Probably kept my safe from being wrecked. But I had anticipated the possibility. There was no money in the safe."

Bones Egan stood for a long moment speechless. Ruth Horn had moved up behind him and he felt her fingers press his arm.

"What do you mean no money?" Egan asked.

In the light of the clustered lanterns Hastings' thick lips curled. A gleam of triumph shone for a moment in his dark eyes. "I mean there was no money in the safe. I suppose I should

thank you gentlemen for your concern and what you imagined to be help. Fortunately I had taken my own precautions. Several days ago I removed all the cash from the bank and had it taken to a safe place."

"Why," Egan snapped, "did you do that?"

"Isn't that now obvious. Since Miss Horn brought her money to me and deposited it in such a manner that all the town knew about it, I felt uneasy. It is evident that those renegades have informers in Wet Basin."

"What makes you think," Egan demanded, "that it was Mexicans who came tonight to raid your bank?"

"Who else could it be?" Hastings countered.

"That's what a lot of us have been wonderin'," Egan said flatly. "Where is the money?"

"That," Hastings said. "I will not tell you until Ed Stone has deputized some aides and taken them to guard it. But I will guarantee Miss Horn and all others concerned that their cash will be available when the bank opens in the morning."

"All right," Egan said, "but some of us will be around until then—keeping our eyes open." Turning as he spoke he said, "Miss Horn, if—"

He stopped in midspeech. Ruth Horn had vanished. Maggie Mason, with her shabby robe gathered close about her robust figure, grabbed his arm and drew him after her away from the gathering.

"Your smart trick didn't work, did it?" Maggie said when they were alone.

"Where is she?" Egan snarled.

"She went away with Mike Halloran," Maggie replied, "and before she went she whispered to me to tell you to quit meddling in her business or she'd make you sorry. I think she means it. Why didn't you tell her—"

"Damn," Egan interrupted. "Where did she and that wild Irishman go?"

"I don't know," Maggie replied, "and if I did I wouldn't tell you. Go ahead and fix to keep a watch on Ed Stone and Milt Hastings. Then come over to my place. I'll have coffee ready."

•

Moving away from the crowd towards the livery stable, Ruth Horn said to Mike Halloran who strode beside her. "Mike, were those Mexicans who came to rob the bank?"

"Sure, colleen, they was dressed like it," Mike answered, "but the yowls that I heard after the shootin' started didn't sound furrin."

"Why did you let Doctor Egan talk you into this without saying anything to me?" she demanded.

Mike didn't reply.

"Are you working for me, Mike?" she asked.

"I am that."

"Then you do just as I tell you from now on. This is what we are going to do—" She talked steadily until they reached the livery stable and the stalls where her saddle horse and Mike's mule were stabled. The hostler was saddling Ruth's mount.

"'Twill be the grand finish, Ruthie darlin'," Mike said then, "and me byes will be enjoyin' it."

"Don't you think you'd better hire a saddle horse, Mike?" Ruth asked as he took a bridle from its peg behind the mule.

"Divil a horse," Mike replied. "ye'll not get yer foine horse far ahead av me jughead, oncet I whisper in his delicate ear."

6

DAWN WAS yet a half hour distant when Bones Egan entered Maggie's restaurant. As she heard him enter Maggie came out of the kitchen and placed a large granite ware coffee pot on the counter where

cups waited. She looked at Egan's grim face and grinned.

"So you slipped," she said. "Where is the money?"

"It's in Ed Stone's cellar," he growled. "And Hastings' explanation of moving it there as a precautionary measure is pat—and backed by the sanction of the law, in the person of Ed Stone."

Maggie nodded as she poured coffee. "Hastings outsmarted you. Fer what good it will do this late, what was your idea in this hokus pokus?"

"I thought the money would be gone—and taken to where Hastings couldn't produce it after we nipped the fake robbery. Then we would have had him in a forked stick and he would have had to expose the whole stinking setup to get the money back and keep from being strung up."

"Mm-m," Maggie said. "That accounts fer all the shootin' and not a one of Biddle's gunslicks bein' turned into a carcass dressed in Mexican duds. Seems to me that woulda been a handy bit of evidence."

"No killing would have been necessary," he retorted, "if we had caught Hastings the way I planned."

Maggie sniffed. "If your uncle could give milk he'd be your aunt."

Egan put down his empty coffee cup. "I want to know where Ruth Horn went—and why?"

"You don't get fat on what you want," Maggie said. "I don't know, but my guess is that she went to even up with you for seein' somethin' she didn't and meddlin' in her shenanigan without consultin' her. Why in thunder did you have to do that just when she was beginnin' to like you a little? I'll tell you why. You wanted to show her you could do something she couldn't—besides raise whiskers. That ain't no way—"

"All right," he barked at her. "If you won't help, I'll find her. The little idiot couldn't get into much trouble if she stayed in town—so she's gone out to the road camp. And that adds up—" He bit off his words and a moment later the street door closed behind him.

Ten minutes later, after a few words with the night hostler at the livery stable, Bones Egan urged his horse to a run on the trail to the road camp. The big dog bounded along beside the horse.

Daylight had come and the east was pink above Black Range when Egan reached the wagon camp. Men were working like beavers as Mike Halloran barked orders. Ruth Horn, still in her weird costume of overalls, nightdress and brogans—hair bobbing on her back in braids—was in the thick of the activity. She saw Egan and stalked to meet him as he dismounted.

"You keep out of this," she snapped. "Go doctor a tuckered sheep or something. I'm running this—and I don't want you around messing it up. And don't tell me it's no job for a lady. It's not being done by a lady. It's being done by a battleaxe. And I don't want any more of your kind of help."

"Listen," he almost shouted. "If

you'll give me a chance to tell you what I was trying to do—"

"The time to tell me," she interrupted hotly, "was before you tried to do it. I know now. Mike told me. And you quit bossing my help. If you had let me in on your play, I could have told you that Hastings was too slick to get caught in such a trap. And there you were with guns all around those fake robbers and let them get away. Well, they won't get away this time."

"So you *are* fixing to raid the Biddle ranch?" he caught her up.

She frowned, then snapped, "I am—and without your help or advice. All I ask—"

She was interrupted by Mike Halloran who had come up behind her. "Whist, acushla," Mike said, " 'tis no time for lovers' spats, wid a bit av a donnybrook brewin'. The byes and me are ready, willin' and able, but divil a man of us knows the way to this Biddle cow farm, nor the lay av the land whin we foind it. 'Tis a big help Misther Egan can be, will he be so kind."

Ruth glared at Mike who met her gaze steadily. "All right," she flared, "take him along, but when we get to that ranch we are going to do exactly what I've already told you—and I'm giving the orders. Moreover, Doctor Egan keeps out of my affairs hereafter—and if you drag him in again, Mike, I'll drop the road and—"

Mike grinned as he cut her off. "Whin I see the daughter av Tim Horn quit a thing to which she has set her hand—"

"Oh damn," she cried. Anger had her on the verge of tears. "If it comes to where I can't do anything without a meddling hoss doctor it's time to quit. Are we ready to start?"

"We are that," Mike assured her.

"Then start," she snapped, then stamped angrily away to where her horse stood ground hitched.

Mike jerked his thumb at a wagon. "I'll be drivin' the front wan," he said to Egan. "If ye will tie yer horse behint and ride beside me."

MINUTES later the eight wagons, each drawn by a stout pair of mules, were rolling across the level floor of the basin. Bones Egan sat beside Mike Halloran on the driver's seat of the lead wagon.

Mike leaned out and looked back along his train, then said, "Herself is in a bit av a stew. She's ridin' wide av our dust a ways behint. 'Twas a bum idea—not tellin' her what we was up to wid our—"

"It was all right," Egan growled, "if it hadn't missed fire."

"True," Mike agreed, "but—"

"What is the purpose of this business, Mike," Egan cut in.

"Herself intends to take over this Biddle place and dig up the clothes that turn that bunch of spalpeens into Mexican bandits and—"

"How is the taking over to be done?" Egan interrupted.

"Herself said we'll decide on that whin we git the place surrounded. The byes and me have made ready to raise hell in wan way or another. I left five byes wid the cook and the flunky to look afther the camp. Forty-siven ridin' these wagons have one av Mr. Colt's peacemakers each and a good new Winchester rifle—wid plenty of shells for all. In each wagon is a box av dynamite from the road blastin' supply—wid sacks av flour and feed around the boxes to head off stray bullets. Besides that—"

"Have your men done any gun fighting?" Egan cut in.

" 'Ridin' behint ye, Misther Egan," Mike assured him, "is the most elegant bunch av fighters iver put together in wan bunch—tools not withstandin'."

Egan smiled thinly. "We'll be going up against gunslicks that have made gunfighting their business since they were buttons. And besides that, we hadn't ought to do any shooting."

Mike shot him a sharp glance. "Why not?"

"Because—" Egan began and fell silent as shouts began to arise from the following wagons.

Ruth Horn came riding fast and

pulled up beside the wagon Mike Halloran was driving. "Turn around, Mike," she screamed. "They are raiding the camp!"

The wagon train had covered no more than a mile. The camp at the foot of the range was still visible. As Halloran turned his mule team to the right and halted it, columns of smoke could be seen arising from the camp. Riders, looking like pigmies at the distance, could be seen scurrying about it. The rattle of rifle fire came faintly through the still morning air.

"Follow me as fast as you can, Mike," Ruth ordered, then wheeled her horse and raced away towards the burning camp.

"I'll need this, Mike," Egan said as he grabbed the Winchester rifle that had rested against the seat beside Halloran and leaped to the ground.

Egan was untying his horse from the rear of the wagon when Mike came to hand him a box of cartridges. "Ye may be needin' these, too," Mike said. "Look out for herself."

Ruth, on her flying sorrel mount, was two hundred yards ahead of Egan when he swung out from the train and started in pursuit. About the same distance behind Egan came the eight wagons, drivers flogging the mules to a run. Ruth had bought a good horse, but it had neither the speed nor the endurance of Egan's rangy roan. He gained on her, swearing because he could gain no faster. Beyond the racing girl, he saw some forty riders coming fast to meet them—the camp having evidently been destroyed.

"Wait, Ruth," Egan shouted at the top of his voice. "Wait!"

But if she heard him she paid no attention. She was now only a hundred yards ahead of him. The oncoming enemy was fast closing distance—and firing as they came. Egan heard the whir of a nearly spent bullet as it passed close. He glanced back and saw the lumbering wagons still following. He looked ahead just in time to see Ruth's mount go down. A rifle slug had caught the racing horse through the forelock and squarely between the ears. Thrown from the falling animal, Ruth hit the ground and went rolling through the dew-wet grass. As Egan came thundering up, she struggled to her knees.

"Stay down—flat," Egan shouted at her as he leaped from his horse. She remained crouched and gave him a dazed look. The Colt which had been in her hand had been lost in her fall.

STILL CLINGING to his rifle, Egan sprang forward and bore her to earth. Bullets were now whistling about them. Then the wagon driven by Mike Halloran rumbled past them, turned and came to a halt with Mike sawing on the lines, his feet braced on the dashboard.

Mike Halloran was bellowing unnecessary orders. The other drivers were veterans of more than one wagon train trek across hostile Indian country. In less than a minute the eight wagons had been halted in a tight circle about Ruth, Egan and the dead horse.

"Turn loose the jugheads," Mike Halloran roared. "Let 'em run for it and be out av our way."

As he shouted, drivers who had leaped to the ground were dropping tugs. Several simply pulled the wagon hammers and let the mules go—double-trees, neck-yokes and lines trailing. Men armed with rifles poured from the wagons and began firing from their shelter at the oncoming foe.

Ruth Horn squirmed and tore herself away from Egan's grasp. He scrambled after her and grabbed an ankle as she tried to rise, bringing her again to earth. Bullets were now thwacking into the wagons and singing through the air about them. The freed mules, kicking and tearing themselves from entangling harness and gear, were racing away from the bedlam. Egan dragged Ruth Horn close to her fallen horse.

"Stay down there," he ordered.

"I can do—" she panted, struggling to rise.

"Damn it!" Egan yelled at her. "Stay down or I'll knock you down! I'm tired of arguing with you."

She sank back to earth and glared up at him. He turned away and took several strides to fling himself prone beside Mike Halloran on the sod in the scant shelter of a wagon's wheels. These were the veteran fighters Halloran had named them. All were now prone in the tall grass within the circle of wagons and blazing away at the foe in business-like manner.

The withering fire halted the oncoming riders some three hundred yards from the embattled wagons. These were not Indians and had no intention of offering themselves as targets while riding a circle to fire upon their prey. They flung themselves from their mounts to almost complete hiding in the lush grass, from where their rifles continued to spit lead.

"Mike," Egan said. "We want these skunks, in their Mexican clothes. Tell your men to knock down their horses so we'll have an even break if they run."

" 'Tis a shame for the poor beasts," Halloran growled, "but a grand notion." He rose on an elbow and shouted. "Come here, Missouri Akers."

Plunging in a low crouch, a tall, lean and bewhiskered man lunged to a place beside them. Smoke was dribbling from the muzzle of his rifle.

"Drop horses, Missouri," Mike said. "as fast as you can." He raised his voice. "The rest of you hold fire unless you see one av thim divils try to get up and make for a horse. Then let 'im have it."

With Mike's last word Missouri's rifle spat. The fake Mexicans had left their horses ground tied when they went to earth. Egan saw one of the horses drop like a poleaxed steer.

"Wan," Mike Halloran said. " 'Tis a grand feller wid a gun Missouri is. Divil a bullet does he waste."

Missouri's rifle blazed again and another horse went down. The guns of the other men had been silenced by Mike's order, but all lay with rifles ready.

"Good shooting," Egan said. "Let's see what I can do." He nestled his cheek to his rifle stock and a moment later pulled the trigger. A horse in the standing cavvy leaped, reared, plunged among its mates and fell. A split second later Missouri's gun blasted again and another horse dropped in its tracks.

"Shoot 'em in the head, feller," Missouri said crisply as he jacked his Winchester.

The bullets from the enemy guns were still seeking targets among the grouped wagons. One hit an iron tire and went singing away. Missouri fired again and another horse dropped. Then the renegades apparently realized what was happening. From their concealment in the grass they rose and started toward their remaining mounts.

"Drop the spalpeens!" Mike Halloran shouted, then brought his rifle stock to his leathery cheek.

Forty-odd rifles ripped the air with almost united reports. The renegades dived back into the tall grass. Some would remain where they fell. But the volley had another effect. Bullets that found no human target tore into the horse herd. One animal went down,

others were hit and the herd scattered and fled, despite the dangling reins.

"Yow!" Mike Halloran bellowed above the clatter of rifles being reloaded. "Kape the snakes in the grass where they belong."

A snort from his roan caused Bones Egan to turn his head. He leaped to his feet, but it was too late. Ruth Horn was in the saddle. She had found the Colt lost in her fall.

"Just keep them away from their horses, Mike," Ruth yelled. Then, digging her heels into the flanks of the roan, she leaped him across a wagon tongue and was racing away towards the town of Wet Basin.

Egan swore savagely. Mike Halloran grinned at him. "I'm thinkin' 'tis a grand idea herself has," Mike declared. "Some fellers on horseback will wind up this ball of yarn in great shape. Herself will be fetchin' 'em."

Egan patted the head of Lance. The dog had crept up beside him. His eyes went to where the scattered mules were now grazing some half mile to the west. "If we could catch one team of mules—"

"In the first place," Halloran cut him off, "nary a jughead will a hand be laid on now, until he feels the nade of oats. In the second place the harness has been busted and scattered over forty acres. In the third place, have ye no sense at all at all? Will ye not give herself a chance to be av some help in this frolic? 'Tis many a day and a lot av soft spakin' 'twill take ye to smooth down the feathers I saw ye ruffle whin ye put herself down behint the dead horse."

"As far as I am concerned," Egan growled, "Ruth Horn can stay ruffled—"

"Whist, me bye," Mike stopped him. "There do be signs that niver fail—and I've seen them in both av ye. 'Twill be a glourious weddin' to dance at—and meself will—"

Mike was interrupted by yells and an outbreak of rifle fire from his crew. The renegades had crept away through the grass and having now gained distance were up and running toward their horses, halted by the dragging reins after a brief flight. The range was now too long and the fire did no harm.

Bones Egan was swearing again. "Let 'em go," Mike Halloran said, "The spalpeens are on the run. We'll be chasin' them to their holes whin herself brings that which is naded for the chase."

A MILE ON her way to town, Ruth Horn looked back and saw the now smaller group of horsemen fleeing southward from the scene of battle. She muttered a few unladylike words and urged the roan to greater speed. Ten minutes later she pulled the blowing horse up before Maggie Mason's restaurant and Maggie who had seen her arrival and met her at the door.

"I want some men with horses and guns, quickly," Ruth snapped. "Where can I get them?"

"Quite a bunch of 'em," Maggie told her, "over around Ed Stone's place—seein' that your money—"

"To hell with my money," Ruth broke in. "I want to get to that Biddle ranch."

"Mebby," Maggie suggested, "we'd make more headway if you cooled a little and told me what it was all about. Can't help until I know what I'm doin'."

Rapidly, Ruth outlined the situation.

"So," Maggie said when Ruth had finished. "I'll go to the livery barn and get somebody started out with a couple of horse teams to where that crazy Irishman and the bunch are. Don't look like they need any help 'sides that. I'll go along and tell them you are headin' for the Biddle ranch with help from here. You can get plenty over around Ed Stone's place to sew up Biddle's place until more come. You have sure as hell stirred up a shindy hereabouts—and all the decent people are on your side—and plenty mad."

Ruth went back to her horse and

raced away. Maggie headed towards the livery stable at a half run.

●

The sun was still two hours high that evening when Ruth Horn, now wearing neat feminine garb, stood on the plank sidewalk before her bank and addressed a crowd of some four hundred who had gathered. More than half the ranchers of the Basin were among the throng. Near Ruth, Milt Hastings, Grant Biddle and erstwhile deputy Sheriff Ed Stone stood surrounded by grim-faced armed men.

"Neighbors," Ruth said, "by this time most of you know what has happened since early this morning. The men of Biddle's crew who were not killed or wounded have escaped—probably to Mexico. One thing is certain—they will not bother this basin again. But the men responsible for what they did are here and—"

"I say let's string 'em up," a voice yelled from the crowd.

"No," Ruth shouted back. "In the first place, remember that we are law abiding citizens. In the second place, that would be poor business. Listen and I will tell you why. Many of you owe Milt Hastings money, and honest men pay honest debts."

"To dead men?" came another shout.

"To their estates," Ruth retorted. "Several of you have told me that you mean to repay loans made to my murdered uncle. And keep this in mind. I have suffered most in today's events. My road camp has been destroyed and seven good honest working men died there. Your help has saved me a lot of money, but I would give ten times as much to bring back just one of the men who were killed. That can not be undone, but these men who are responsible for that slaughter although they did not actually do it can be made to repay all of us more substantially than with their worthless lives."

"How?" several voices demanded in chorus.

"By repaying me for the damage done to my property," Ruth told them, "and by absolving the rest of you from all debt in exchange for being allowed to get out of this valley fast and alive."

"You make sense, lady," a rancher shouted.

"Don't call me lady," Ruth almost screamed. "Call me Ruth. Call me a battleaxe. Call me friend—which I hope to be to all of you. But, by God, I will not be a lady. However there is plenty of time to settle that. Right now I'm asking you to let me deal with these men who have ridden high over the people of this basin until today. If you will agree to that, I will allow them to go free after they have cancelled all your debts, paid me for damage to my property and left any other funds they have to go to the families or other heirs of the men killed at the road camp. Those of you who agree to that please say yes."

The affirmative came in a mighty roar.

THAT NIGHT had passed and another had come. Wet Basin had settled down to talk about the upheaval that had cleansed it of fear and the domination of the erstwhile tyrants who had been more than glad to decamp alive. It was nearing ten o'clock and the Mexican woman and her daughter were preparing to close the now customerless restaurant for the night. Maggie Mason and Mike Halloran sat at the table in the private dining room, drinking coffee that gave off an aroma not ordinarily associated with the coffee bean. They turned their heads as the door opened and Bones Egan entered the smaller room.

"Where," Egan demanded of Maggie, "is she?"

"If you mean Miss Horn," Maggie replied, her eyes unusually bright as she met his, "she has gone to her room to rest after a long hard day of loanin' great gobs of money to Tom, Dick and Harry. Will you join us in a cup of coffee?"

Egan picked up Maggie's half emptied cup and sniffed at it. "I think I will," he said. "Mebby a couple of cups."

Ten minutes later Egan put down the cup that he had emptied for the second time. "Maggie," he said. "loan me a hundred dollars."

For a moment Maggie looked puzzled, then she grinned and rose, upsetting her chair as she did so. Egan picked up the chair as Maggie departed from the room. She returned a few minutes later and dropped five golden double eagles on the table before Egan.

"This," she said, enunciating her words carefully, "is a gift if you leave the door open. If you shut the door, you'll owe me a hundred and fifty dollars—providin' you live."

Egan scowled at Maggie as he picked up the coins. "This is private business," he declared as he strode to a door which opened into Maggie's spare room. He tried the door and found it locked.

"Who is it?" Ruth Horn's voice came faintly. "What do you want?"

Bones Egan lifted a long leg and drove a boot-shod foot against the door just beside the knob. The door flew open with a crashing and splintering sound. Egan pushed through it and closed it as best he could behind him. Mike Halloran started to rise from his chair. Maggie reached out and dragged him back, "Set down," she said. "Can ye sing?"

"Like a thrush in the thickets of Ballyterim, acushla," Mike replied, "but herself—"

"Forget about herself," Maggie snapped. "Start singin' and sing loud. There will be noises from yonder that will be none of our business. And you have nothing invested. Sing, or I'll bang ye with this coffee pot."

TWENTY minutes later Mike Halloran was still singing verses of a song about an Irishman who had married a widow. His coffee-husky voice bellowed:

"Oh she'd lick him and she'd kick him
And she wouldn't leave him be.
She'd thump him and she'd bump him
Until she couldn't see.
She might av licked McCarthy
But she couldn't lick me."

At that point the broken door opened and Bones Egan came through, a long arm about a red-faced and subdued Ruth Horn.

Maggie Mason grinned at the hastily and sketchily clad pair, but Mike Halloran who had now really put his heart into his singing warbled on:

"Oh McCarthy was an angel
But by hivins I'm a man!"

Hugging Ruth Horn in a bright colored robe close to his side, Egan tossed five gold coins onto the table before Maggie.

"It wasn't fair," Ruth cried. "I didn't really try."

"And why didn't ye?" Maggie demanded.

Ruth giggled. "He promised that if he won we'd hunt up a preacher," she said.

Mike Halloran rose, placed his hands flat on the table and grinned at Maggie Mason. "Maggie, darlin'," he said, "I'd be havin' a conference wid ye in yonder room."

Maggie picked up the huge coffee pot. "I'm in no humor for rasslin'," she said. "But will ye shave and buy some clothes the likes of which human bein's wear, I'll mix with ye in a double weddin' as soon as a preacher kin be found and—"

The door from the restaurant opened and Maria looked in. "I will lock up now, senora Maggie," she said, "if—"

"Lock up," Maggie bellowed at her, "and set the joint on fire for all I care—"

"Whurrah, colleen," Mike Halloran cut in. "Remimber 'tis for your money I'm marryin' ye and—"

Maggie threw the coffee pot and a moment later was bending above Mike's prone and groaning form. "Mike, darlin'," she begged, "say it did ye no harm. Ye just made me so damn mad—"

Ruth Horn was suddenly laughing hysterically as she clung to Bones Egan. He shook her vigorously and she regained control and looked up at him through swimming eyes.

"Bones, dear," she gasped. "What a lot of fun we are going to have in this basin!"

★

THE CIBOLERO

Fact Feature by Daniel Pitt

THE MEXICAN buffalo-hunter was known as a Cibolero. He usually wore a leather pair of trousers and jacket and a flat straw hat. Over his shoulder was his carcage or quiver of bow and arrows. The long handle of his lance was set in a case and suspended by the side with a strap from the pommel of his saddle. Perhaps he carried a not-too-dependable rifle.

Each year a large party of Ciboleros would gather in New Mexico to procure a supply of buffalo beef for their families. They would hunt just like the Indian, chiefly on horseback, using either bow and arrow or the lance. They would load their kill on their carts or on mules.

They would cure the meat by slicing it thin and spreading or suspending it in the sun. One observer commented, "During the curing operation they often follow the Indian practice of beating or kneading the slices with their feet which they contend contributes to its preservation."

The caravans coming West simplified the process of curing the meat. A line was stretched from corner to corner on each side of a wagon body and strung with slices of buffalo beef which remained from day to day until it was sufficiently cured to be stacked away. When the weather was too damp the meat would be slightly barbecued by placing it upon a scaffold or fire.

★

THE RED MAN'S STORY

A Series Of
TRUE FACT ARTICLES
by White Eagle

7. Indians Not Wanted

THE FOLLOWING morning, after saddling up, I took two twenty dollar gold coins from my saddlebag; these I handed to the chief, who could hardly believe his eyes as he looked the coins over. Placing both of his old and gnarled hands on my shoulders, he spoke with the love of a father to a long lost son, *"Mazaska Ota, Wamdi Ska Waste"* (lots of money; White Eagle is good). Big Foot was a great chief, but old—he was just past eighty; some ten years later, he was murdered with nearly three hundred of his people, men women and children. This crime was committed by the Seventh Cavalry, on December the 29th, 1890, on Wounded Knee Creek in southwestern South Dakota.

As we rode away from the camp, I felt a heaviness around my heart; I felt that I was riding away from a people who needed my guidance. They had given me their protection and friendship since my childhood; I wondered; would I ever see them again? I had a feeling that I was riding into something I would not be able to understand; but having started, I would have to continue—come what may.

Riding along at a slow dog-trot, we kept a sharp lookout; that, however, would not have been necessary, for here and there I noticed many riders off in the distance. They were Sioux; the old chief had sent many warriors

to see us out of the danger-zone. No doubt, he had been a bit worried that the Crows would trail us down, once we were alone. The foxy Sioux was taking no chances where I was concerned.

A few hours later I saw them circle through the timber, higher up in the hills, and disappear. This could mean but one thing; we were outside the zone of danger.

It was not long before we came onto a deep-rooted wagon-trail which, as Jack stated, was the Stage and freighting trail leading up to Deadwood. Dismounting, he told me to do the same, and speaking to me he said, "Looky hyar, son, we will be a headin' in to a settlement where some folk's ain't hankerin' none fer Indians; and as yo' be lookin' a heap as redskin yo' orter undo yore hair and get rid of them feathers."

Well now, I didn't mind unbraiding my hair. But the eagle feathers—these I had won by deeds, and acts of bravery in battle, and there was nothing he could do or say that would make me part with them. They were given to me by Iron Bull during ceremonial pow wows, when all the worthy received their feathers of honor; they were all I had to remind me of my adopted father.

Combing my hair, I tied it together back of my head; the feathers were carefully placed in my saddle bags. Getting my extra gunbelt, I strapped it on. Jack was watching me closely as I looked the gun over, to be sure it was fully loaded and in working order. "Looky hyar, son, ye would be a heap better off not packin' them guns. A fellow got to know how to use 'em, or he might get into a heap of trouble."

I did not answer him, but spotting a tin can about twenty feet or so up the road, I called his attention to it; making a fast draw I fanned my gun and sent the can spinning down the road. Reloading the gun, I mounted my horse ready to ride.

Jack kept standing on the road looking up at me. Finally he spoke. "How did yo' ever learn to shoot that way, son? Yo' would a beat even old Wild Bill himself. How come yo' to handle sixguns thataway?"

I told him of my old pin-fire when I was a kid, and of the gun I had gotten from Yellowstone Kelly, handing him Kelly's gun.

He looked it over. "So old Yellerstone gave yo' this one, did he? Ain't seen that old trail-buster in a mighty long spell."

He mounted his horse and we started up the road. "Well, son, I ain't mindin' it none when I say yo' be a heap faster than any I ever seen; yeah, maybe even faster than old Bill hisself."

IT WAS NOT long before we rode into a small settlement of some twenty five or thirty buildings, mostly of log and dobie; a few were of the false-front type. There were but few people in sight as we rode up to the livery stable and dismounted. After seeing that our horses were well cared-for, we headed across the one and only street the settlement had, and entered a building over which a sign read, *Dad's Trading Post.*

No one was in the store except an old gent snoozing in an easy chair. Jack roused him with a war whoop that shook the building. Rubbing his eyes, the oldster squinted up at us; as he recognized Jack he came out of the chair. "Why, dad bust it, ye old trail-buster—ain't seen yer in a coon's age; thought sure the Crows done lifted yore hair!"

"Well, Dad, reckon but fer this young one hyar they might of done it."

"That so, Jack—how come?"

The scout told him all that had happened, while I looked around the store. Finding much I could use, I began picking things to my liking—a red shirt, a hat that just fitted my head. I walked over to where the hardware was stacked; here I picked out two boxes of shells for my side-arms and two more for my rifle. Dad, who had

been watching me, came over. "Yo' aimin' to buy, or jest heppin' yoreself, feller?"

I didn't answer; I was much too interested in looking at things I had never seen before. It was all new to me—a stack of colored blankets caught my eye and, picking out two of the most colorful I walked over to where the can goods were stacked with Dad right at my heels. The old scout standing off to one side was bursting with laughter as he watched me helping myself, with Dad cussing right behind me.

"Better hold yore hosses, Dad; that youngster is mighty bad medicine when riled."

Picking out two cans of pork and beans, and a box of crackers, I walked over by Jack and put my goods on the table. Handing him a can of beans, I said, "We eat, now."

Dad really blew up. "Ain't never seen such a mess of gutch as this young one has, heppin hisself; yo' aimin' to pay fer it?"

Dumping a handful of gold coins on the table I said, "I help myself; now you help yourself."

"Waste." (Good.) A grin spread over the oldster's face as he looked at the gold. "Well, dad gone it, that's a heap of good money."

Picking out a ten and a twenty dollar gold piece, he handed me back three silver dollars. "Here yo' be son; reckon she is all yores."

As we were eating our beans, a redheaded stranger entered; stopping just inside the door and looking us over before coming forward. "Got any forty-five cartridges?"

"Sure have," Dad stated, going over to get them. I noticed that the stranger was wearing two guns on his hips; both were tied down.

"Professional gun-slinger," Jack whispered; "maybe a bad one."

The redhead came over and sat down. "Yo' gents ridin'?" he asked, sort of politely.

"Yep, reckon so," Jack answered; "yo' headin' any place perticular?"

"Nope, just ridin' to keep from gettin' rusty; take a job now and then to keep from starvin' to death. Folks got to eat more or less regular. Made a few dollars ridin' guard with a freight outfit; too darn slow, reckon I am open to the highest bidder."

Somehow or other, I couldn't keep my eyes off this fellow; there was something about him I couldn't figure out. He was older than myself, by four or five years; his motions were nervous; he was never still; he acted as some animal that was being hunted. But his movements were quick and sure, his voice had a slow drawl to it when he spoke. I learned later that it was the old Texas lingo, that all Texans used in those days. I rather liked the fellow, but to Jack, this redhead was just another who would kill without regret.

Jack knew we were in the presence of a man who was just as apt to jump one way as the other. It didn't bother me, but Jack—as an older and more experienced frontiersman—did not overlook the fact that this man could be plenty dangerous. Even old Dad was a bit baffled; but he kept his trap shut, and said nothing.

Looking at the stranger's guns as he got up, I noticed they were hanging a bit lower than mine, and the way he had them tied down gave me ideas of my own. It also reminded me of the necessity of tying my own guns down. Getting a string of whang leather from Dad, I proceeded to apply them to my holsters.

The stranger, seeing what I was up to came over. "Here, feller, let me hep yo'."

Fixing my holsters to his—as well as my own—satisfaction, he looked me over. "Know how to use yore guns, feller?"

"Reckon I can pull trigger," was my answer to his question.

Looking at me a bit doubtful, he

said, "Bet the drinks I can outdraw, and outshoot any man in this two-bit town."

Looking over at the scout I got the "go ahead" sign. Being sure of my own skill and speed, I decided that a friendly shooting-match could do no harm. Taking the two empty bean cans from the table, we walked outside. Placing the cans in the middle of the street I walked back some twenty feet, telling the redhead to take his pick, and asking the scout to give the word.

We were ready. Could I beat this white man? I was not too sure, but I meant to try. I noticed that the redhead was leaning forward tensely, while I stood slightly sidewise. The word "go" came; my can went spinning along the street just ahead of the redhead's. He was good, but not good enough; so here again the art of fanning a gun had shown its superiority over thumbing the hammer.

"Well," drawled the scout, "reckon there ain't no question as to who is the better artist in this here show of gunplay. The white eagle wins, the red hawk looses, sure does."

"Sure does," Dad put in; "ain't never seen a feller what can handle guns as that young one." While the redhead stood looking at me, I reloaded my gun. My thoughts were with Iron Bull at that moment; had he been able to see this exhibition of gunplay against this white man, he would have been a mighty proud old chief.

WHEN THE redhead spoke, he said, "Well, reckon yo' plum skinned my shootin'; ain't one done it before—reckon a feller lives to learn. And seein' as I lost, what will it be gents—hard likker, or what will yo' have?"

The scout stated flatly he would have no firewater, but was willing to take on a feed. At that, a grin spread over Dad's face. "Yeah, come on; reckon I can cook up a mess of grub fer yo' hungry gunslingers."

"Just a minute ye old varmint," the scout put in; "we ain't hankerin' fer none of yore ulcer-developin' grub; reckon we aim to eat at Ma Perkins Messhouse."

Dad wheeled and glared at him. "Now ye done it ye' onery hunk of crow-bait, insulting my cookin'—and just what's wrong with it? Ye ort to have better sense."

"Well, now, Dad—reckon if I had any, I wouldn't hang around yore beanpots; yore cookin's plum bad," grinned the scout.

The redhead, who was enjoying himself over the way the argument was running, spoke up. "Yep, when it comes to food and likker, I sure like mine pure and wholesome."

"Huh!" Dad snorted, shuffling back to his store. Turning before entering, he yelled, "Blast yore 'onery hide, Jack Crawford, yer ain't nothin' but a 'onery horn toad; hope the Crows lift yore hair afore long." Then he disappeared through the open door.

Grinning, the scout led us to a small frame building; inside, a young girl of about seventeen greeted us with a smile as she recognized the scout. I had never seen such a beautiful girl —but then I had seen but very few white girls in my young life. This one fascinated me. Her hair was that of the sun goddess; her eyes a deep violet-blue that looked like something out of another world. I remembered Edna, but she could never have compared with this girl. I wondered; is she real? Try as I would, I could not keep my eyes off her. I remembered the two little golden-haired girls who had been with the wagon-train below white river. Could she be one of them? But no, that was less than three years ago.

The superstition and belief in the supernatural, which I had developed to a certain extent was working in my mind; going over I took hold of her arm to make sure she was flesh and blood. At that moment, an old lady came from a back room; seeing me laying hand on the girl, she bellowed,

"Get yore dirty Indian hands off my girl."

Dropping my hand I said, "I mean no harm; I have never seen white women so beautiful, I didn't know she was real."

Turning, I walked out and headed for Dad's store.

As I entered, Dad was still cussing the scout for mighty near every thing he could think of. On seeing me, he smiled a bit. "Well, son, want some of my cookin'?"

"Sure do, Dad; let's eat."

As we were eating, the girl from the Perkins place came in. Coming over to me she said, "I am so sorry over the way Antie spoke to you. Mister Crawford gave her a good talking to; she, too, is sorry now—so won't you come back over?"

I didn't answer.

"What's the argument?" Dad wanted to know. When the girl told him, he blew up. "Listen hyar honey, yo' go back home and tell that old she-bear she ort to be plum ashame of herself. This youngster ain't no redskin; he was adopted by 'em as a mite of a kid and lived with em fer a spell till he growed up. But his folks were as white as yores and mine; and dad gone it, now as he done left 'em, folks ort to treat him as a white man which he sure as shootin' is. As fer me, I would be mighty proud to have him for my son."

"I know, Dad; Mister Crawford told us, and I feel so very bad over what Antie did."

"So the old trailbuster told yo', did he?" Dad blurted. "Did he tell yo' that but fer this youngster, he would have lost his scalp; no, reckon he didn't."

Tiring of listening, I got up, offering to pay for the food.

Dad would have none of it. "Yer ain't owin' me nothin', son."

Picking up the goods I had bought, I left and headed for the livery, where I paid the feed-bill, and saddled up. Leading my horse outside, I found that the girl was waiting for me.

She came over. "Are you going away?"

"Yes," I said. "I go."

"Oh, but you must not go. I like you; we all like you. Please...won't you stay?"

Looking at her, I said, "You are like the sun-goddess, beautiful and pure, but I cannot stay. White people do not understand me, and I do not understand them. I am but a dirty Indian."

As I mounted my horse, she cried, "Oh...no! *You* are not a dirty Indian; please don't go away."

I had seen many things in this girl —beauty, kindness, love. But I could not forget what her aunt first thought when she saw me. It would always start like that. I was but a dirty Indian, not wanted by white folks. Maybe I was all right when they found out I wasn't an Indian, after all—but that was worse. I was all right, maybe, but everything in my life that meant anything to me—all the kindness and honor I had known with Iron Bull and the Sioux was nothing to white people. Just "dirty".

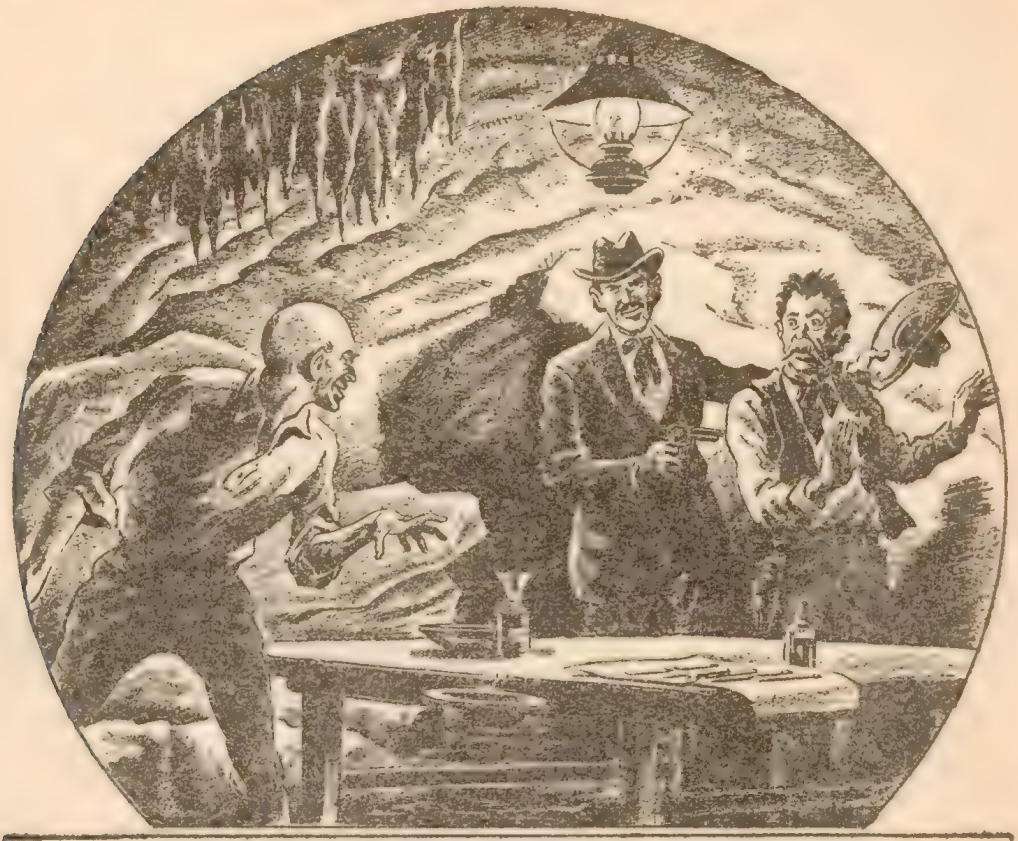
I was angry as I rode off into the wilderness.

★

Two-Legged Buzzards

the eighth story in this series of true-fact pictures of the west as it was, will appear in our next issue.

A "Lee Winters" Story



A brilliantly-lighted and oddly-furnished cavern met Winters' eyes. "My laboratory, Winters. My hospital, my operating room." He looked at the deputy. "My patient."

A DESERT HIPPOCRATES

by Lon Williams

A wail in the night...plaintive cries echoing over Alkali Flat...and a man with a noble nose. Deputy Marshal Lee Winters felt uneasy—and, as usual, he had good reason...

DEPUTY MARSHAL Lee Winters, gunfight-weary and homeward bound from Rocky Point an hour before midnight, pulled his horse to an uneasy halt on Alkali Flat. Out of starlit gloom and loneliness had come a weird, far cry. In that eery solitude, it smote upon his fancy as a voice from another world, outside of time.

"Oooooo-rand!" it called. In pitch and plaintiveness, it was feminine; because it evoked no answer, it was heart-rending and forlorn. Yet it persisted—seeming near, then far, as night winds lifted and fell. "Oooooo-rand! Oh, Oooooo-reeeeee!"

Northward a couple of miles, lights of Forlorn Gap shone dimly through intervening alkali dust. They were lights of home, a tired wayfarer's dream come true. But far away across Alkali Flat, a woman's voice called from immeasurable tenderness and love for someone lost. Here, then, was a tug-of-war between instincts of chivalry and a longing to be safe at home. In Winters' sentimental bosom, chivalry was a mighty force—in any other than extraordinary circumstances dominant over self-interest, over danger, fear and mystery.

But on Alkali Flat at night, experience had taught him that nothing was ordinary. This desert waste, supposedly, was a place where nothing lived, or could live for long. Yet at night it teemed with life, as if darkness had resurrected its dead; concededly honest men claimed to have seen Indians silently playing games there by moonlight, and herds of buffalo that grazed upon vast green pastures. Wolves howled there, too, though not a wolf-track could be found by day. Indeed, by day it was a shimmering white desert, as bare as a floor in a vacant house.

At night it was an abode of owls, of dead things that walked, of voices as disembodied and insubstantial as their spirit origins.

This was night. When sweat popped on his face, and his skin began to sting, Winters knew he was scared stiff. Sweat was pouring, and his skin was stinging now. His big rangy horse, Cannon Ball, too, exhibited much of his master's demoralization and fear. Like his master, Cannon Ball wanted no truck with Alkali Flat and its nocturnal creatures, real or spectral. Accordingly, when a spur raked his flank, he lifted his hoofs and set them down hard.

●

In Forlorn Gap's only saloon, Doc Bogannon, its owner, began to tidy up for closing. As usual, this had been a profitable and interesting evening, an assortment of questionable strange characters contributing to both results. Because it was a town where busy stage-roads met, Forlorn Gap had for months seen its unfailing quota of strangers. In service to boom-towns north and west, stagecoaches ran day and night—which meant good hunting for road-agents, scoundrels too unimaginative to envisage the inevitable hangropes that awaited them.

There were other types of evil men, too, Bogannon reflected while he put a shine on his bar. He had in mind a gentry more subtle and sinister in their composition and behavior (consequently more dangerous) than those blood-and-thunder badmen who robbed stages and murdered foolhardy adventurers. These were able characters, brilliant in dark inexplicable ways, living in a shadowland of intellect and motive, sometimes consummating evil deeds by devious means, sometimes striking with such simplicity that even a most cautious person could be caught unawares. From where they came, Doc Bogannon did not know. It was as if they were spawned in this semi ghost-town of Forlorn Gap, born to spill its blood and to have their own blood spilled into its desert sands.

Bogie laid aside his swabber, selected a clean cloth and gave the glasses their final polish. Then he observed a stranger who had just entered through his swinging doors. Here was a character, thought Doc instantly. He was straight and handsome, swarthy of complexion, smooth of face, his mass of wavy dark hair hanging low on his neck beneath a small black felt hat.

He came up, placed his long-fingered hands on Doc's shiny bar. "Howdy," he said, an air about him

shading between insult and insanity.

"Howdy," said Doc, inwardly amused.

DOC BOGANNON was a tall, broad-shouldered individual with dark hair parted loosely upon a fine head. Physically he was a gentleman fit to walk with kings. He was a man of great mind, too, a philosopher in both intelligence and disposition, understanding men, good and bad, and finding them equally interesting. Despite his obvious fitness for greater things, Bogannon was, for reasons best known to himself, contented as owner and operator of a gold-town saloon—and happy as companion of a good-looking Shoshone half-breed wife.

This man who stared out of queer, far-looking brown eyes would have irritated a less charitable person than Doc; patently he regarded himself as a superior being. "I am Spurlock Mosely," he announced importantly.

"I am Doc Bogannon," said Doc, as matter-of-fact as Mosely was pompous.

Spurlock Mosely nodded with condescension. "Now that we are so well acquainted, I presume I may make myself at home in your delectable whiskey palace?"

"A pleasure," said Doc.

"Thank you."

Doc smiled, found something to do. Prior to that interruption from Spurlock Mosely, his attention had rested quizzically upon another stranger—a small, unfriendly nonentity who sat alone, had spoken to no one and taken no drink. When he'd looked about at all, he'd done so with incomparable gloom. It was worth a drink, thought Doc, to know what this poor mortal's trouble was. Few patrons remained; it was a leisure time, approaching midnight.

Doc filled a wine-glass, poured himself a small drink and joined his silent, lonely guest. "Mind?" he asked gently.

"I suppose not."

"Bogannon is my name."

"What of it?"

Doc took that one smiling. "Sorry, if I offend." He proffered his wine. "I brought you a drink. Now, knowing your name would promptly improve our social relations."

Free wine deserved some measure of gratitude. "I'm Winthrop—Thackery Baine Winthrop. I'm stopping in your town merely because it's so little worse than what I left." Winthrop drank sparingly, found his wine good and drank some more.

"You're not a Boston Winthrop, by chance?" asked Bogie.

"I should hope not."

"Ah? What's wrong with Boston?"

"What's right with Boston?"

Bogie sipped wine. "Well, sir, you've put me in a quandary. But I'd say—for men like you and me—Boston is a fine place to stay away from."

"So is every other place," declared Winthrop. "If you leave one place because it's sorry, it will only be to hit a sorrier one."

Doc folded his arms. "I'd say you're right, Winthrop. Fortunately, though, an individual like us will find circumstances fully accommodating to his nature. By that, I mean a fellow can be at no more than half a dozen places at once, but he can stay away from unnumbered thousands of 'em. Think of that blessing and smile, Winthrop."

"I never smile."

Bogie got up. "More wine?"

"No."

Doc washed and dried their glasses. He was taking a peek at his watch when his batwings swung in, and a lean, middle-aged newcomer tramped in.

"Winters!"

Winters strode forward. "Wine, Doc."

Bogie filled a glass. He also reached under his bar for a vinegar dish and clean face cloth. "Hadn't seen you in a couple of days, Winters. You've come across Alkali Flat, too; your face is wet with sweat, and stinging red from alkali dust. Here, wash up."

Winters downed his drink and swabbed his face with vinegar. "Doc, sometimes I vow that I'll never again cross Alkali Flat at night. I ought to pay my vows, or quit makin' 'em."

"Seen another ghost, eh?"

"You don't believe in ghosts, and I do," said Winters. "So we won't argue." He took a quick glance around. His mirthless eyes rested upon misery incarnate. "Who's he, Doc?"

"A new friend of mine. Winthrop, by name—Thackery Baine Winthrop."

Winters regarded Winthrop uncharitably. "Looks right downhearted."

"Yes," said Bogie. "Winthrop is what you might call a man with a gloomy outlook."

"Fitting description," Winters said with distaste. He regarded himself as potentially every man's enemy, was slow to admit otherwise. "When I was a button down on Trinity River, Doc, our neighbor ten miles across Trinity bottoms had such an outlook. Gloomy people were not common in Texas, but this feller was an exception. He'd sit droopily on a log for hours and study how everything was going to dogs and snakes. Face got flabby and long. At forty his dewlaps were so long you could tie 'em in a double-bow knot under his chin. Finally somebody found out what his trouble was; he had a hurtin'."

Thack Winthrop rose indignantly, came forward and stared at Winters. "Maybe you think you're humorous; well, you're not. Truth is I, too, have a hurting. It's here in my chest. But that isn't why I'm not jumping up and cracking heels, pretending happiness. There's nothing to be happy about. As for your cheap wit, I could spit on it."

Winters laid down an extra coin. "Doc, set 'em up for a brave man. You can tell him, too, that except for a stray bright spot or two, I agree with him. Everything's hopeless, nothing to live for; we ought to all go off and die. Goodnight, Doc."

DOC'S MANNER, after Winters' departure, was one of gentle reproof. "Winthrop, you've hurt my friend's feelings. Deputy Winters was not trying to be funny. But, here. Winters would be hurt still more if you refused his generosity." Doc filled a glass with wine. He passed it to Winthrop, who stared at it, finally picked it up and returned to his table and melancholy meditations.

A chair scraped and Doc saw Spurlock Mosely rise and move with impressive dignity to Winthrop's table. He continued his work, but observed them casually.

Mosely, a wary eye on Bogannon, introduced himself to Winthrop, leaned close and spoke secretively. "I overheard your remarks to that impudent deputy marshal. That took nerve, Winthrop; you know, I like you." He looked at Thack Winthrop's gloomy face, particularly his nose, one part of his anatomy which he found attractive. "In confidence, I have something to tell you."

Winthrop sipped wine, regarded Mosely with suspicion. "I don't trust you; why should you trust me?"

"Because," said Mosely, "deep within you, there's nobility. Your face—especially your nose—proclaims it. I noticed that at once; being an authority in human anatomy, I admired it."

"You a doctor?"

Mosely glanced cautiously at Bogannon. "I am more than a doctor, Winthrop. I am a great surgeon, unexcelled anywhere." From a coat pocket he removed a bottle, uncorked it. Onto a pad of cotton he sprinkled a liquid. He pretended to smell, then passed it. "Take a whiff of that cotton. You spoke of pain in your chest. That liquid is a magic fluid which destroys pain."

Winthrop, still distrustful, breathed conservatively. Here was an odor he'd never smelled before, sweet, penetrating fumes, soothing, almost stupefying in its effects. "What is it?"

"Chloroform."

"Never heard of it."

"Not surprising. It's a new thing. I learned of it in England, my native land. I make it—also use it."

"For what?"

"To kill pain." He took back his cotton. "Is not that hurting gone from your chest?"

Winthrop breathed slowly, then deeply; his gloom lessened. "For a wonder, I have no pain—not a bit."

Mosely pocketed his possessions. "Your hurting is over. This small favor I did for you was because I liked you—for standing up to that deputy marshal. But I must be going."

Winthrop sprang up. "Wait! I'd like to buy some of that. Will you—"

"Of course," said Mosely. "Come; I'll overwhelm you with it."

Doc casually noted their departure and looked at his watch. Midnight. Apron exchanged for coat, he began to extinguish lights. Suddenly his nose quivered. *What's that I smell?* Something he'd never smelled before. He puzzled over it until he'd locked up. Then, remembering his amorous Shoshone, he hurried homeward.

SPURLOCK MOSELY and Thackery Baine Winthrop found two horses hitched back of Bogie's saloon. Mosely explained that he had just bought an extra one. Winthrop, however, mounted without questions; they rode away into Alkali Flat.

A mild stupor was upon Winthrop; consequently time passed somewhat as it did in sleep. But his stupor was gone when they stopped in a cliff-walled canyon, miles from their starting point. They dismounted, led their horses into an arched passage and ground-hitched them. A dim light diffused itself from unseen lamps.

"Well, here we are, Winthrop," Mosely announced a few seconds later.

"Where?" asked Winthrop. It was an idle question, for they were in a cavernous room, lighted by brilliant lamps suspended from its ceiling.

"This," explained Mosely, "is my laboratory, my operating room. I am a great surgeon—or did I mention that? And this—" His thumb indicated something immediately behind Winthrop.

Winthrop turned in alarm. What he faced filled him with revulsion and terror. In stature it was a man, straight and of excellent proportions, dressed in trousers and a robe of expensive quality. That which repelled and sickened was its face. It was a face without a nose. And from an inch above its ears, there was no hair on its head.

"My brother," said Spurlock Mosely. "His name is Sir Jared Mosely. We are both great surgeons, equally great, I'd say."

Winthrop swallowed, stared, perspired. "Wh—what happened to him?"

"That," said Spurlock, "is quite a story. Briefly, it's this. Misfortune drove us from England. Entrance papers into your country being unobtainable, we smuggled ourselves in through Mexico. Being doctors, we earned as we traveled. My brother operated surgically on a Comanche chief—unsuccessfully, as you may surmise. Comanches in revenge cut off Sir Jared's nose, lips and ears, and lifted his scalp."

Winthrop tried vainly to swallow. "B—but—"

"Yes," said Spurlock. "You are thinking Sir Jared still has his lips and ears. It happens that those anatomical parts are not his own; they were borrowed—borrowed from, let us say, your predecessors. A rather good-looking gold-digger named Orand Hodge donated his lips. Those ears were gifts from a traveling salesman—which, incidentally, this salesman did not particularly need, a glib tongue being his main stock in trade."

Winthrop cast about in horror. This was a nightmare, he told himself. Soon he would awake, wipe away sweat and breathe a grateful sigh. Yet everything was too real to be substance dreams were made of. Where light fell brightest stood a broad table. Beside it were small cabinets filled with shiny instruments—tweezers, knives, needles...

Suddenly he screamed. "I'm getting out of here."

But as he fled, Sir Jared Mosely stepped into his path, enclosed him in strong arms. Immediately Spurlock stepped forward with rawhide thongs and bound him, hand and foot. Together they laid him down, strapped him tight, and began to cut away his coat and shirt. They removed a derringer and its holster from under his left arm and they tossed them aside.

"Have no fear," Spurlock bade him. "You will feel no pain."

"Wh—what are you going to do?"

"We are going to borrow your nose," Sir Jared said happily. "You see, I haven't any. It's rather embarrassing, too, this having no nose. You have a splendid one—fortunately. My brother has been prospecting daily for a good nose, one like my own—that is, what was once my own."

Winthrop screamed again, then glared. "You mean you're going to cu-cut off my nose?"

"It amounts to that," said Spurlock. "My brother will lie on this table beside you. Very close, indeed; so close you will seem to be kissing each other. His nose scar will be trimmed and freshened with a knife. When he awakes he will have your nose, sewed to his face. When you awake— No, that's right, you won't awake."

Spurlock Mosely moved away, washed his hands, lighted small lamps under a rectangular, silvered boiler. He returned with a bottle and a pad of cotton which he laid over Winthrop's nose. Winthrop saw and felt a liquid sprinkling down. He screamed, shook his head, tried to break his bonds, but soon he relaxed—into a sleep too deep for dreams, even.

DEPUTY Winters stirred from half-sleep and lay wide-eyed, staring at a starry sky. Beside him lay his beautiful wife, Myra, sleeping soundly. She had been left a widow in Forlorn Gap. In marrying her, Winters had come into a neat story-and-half cottage with this upstairs bedroom; a reasonably-good mining claim, on which he set foot occasionally for possessory reasons; and a companionship that daily grew more enchanting. Someday he was going to give up being a deputy marshal and settle down, work his mining claim or, better still, stake out a ranch in some mountain valley and raise cattle and a family.

But as he gazed out of their bedroom window, he had a premonition that this dream of a peaceful life might not come true. Danger was abroad; he sensed it, as he had sensed danger on other occasions and lived to face it. That voice on Alkali Flat had unnerved him—more so than he had thought possible at first. He could still hear it in fancy, calling plaintively, receiving no answer, calling again —and again. *Oooooo-reeeeee!* Like a cry from far, mystic shores of eternity.

Next day he rode to Pangborn Gulch. Three days later he was in Brazerville to deliver a prisoner and collect a reward. A week later he was in Elkhorn Pass, where he came upon a crowd of miners congregated around a man on a store platform, a well-dressed man, straight, dignified, eloquent.

"And here, gentlemen, I have your answer. A bit of this wonder-drug dissolved in water in your palm and sniffed up your nostrils will relieve that tightness and dryness that afflicts so many people in these semi-desert regions. You will instantly feel it tingling upward into your head, soothing, cleansing, adding to your joy of living, lengthening your days. Come right up and for one dollar take with you one of these small cubes of my great discovery..."

Winters rode close and tossed a silver dollar over intervening heads. "There, you great windbag; toss me one of your pieces of hocus-pocus."

"Ah, sir! But you err when you call Dr. Spurlock Mosely a windbag. I am a benefactor to mankind; what I have to sell is worth many times what I'm asking. But here, you impudent deputy marshal." Mosely tossed a cube to

Winters, who rose in his stirrups to catch it. "Who will be first to follow officer Winters' sensible example? Ah, there you are! And you—and you—and you—"

Winters pocketed his purchase and rode to Forlorn Gap. Several days passed uneventfully, and then late at night he rode in from a successful but nerve-racking gunfight on Pedigo Road.

Bogie was chatting with his latest new friend when his batwings swung and a wiry, dusty visitor tramped in.

"Winters!" Doc exclaimed joyfully. "Come, join us. We were just getting set for a nightcap." When Winters had slumped into a chair, Doc introduced his new friend. "Deputy Winters, meet Spurlock Mosely who, I am pleased to have learned, is a famous doctor—world-famous, I should have said."

Winters used his hands to remove his hat and wipe sweat from his forehead. He never shook hands with Doc's new friends; he didn't like to shake with a man he might later have to shoot. "We've met already, Doc."

"Ah," said Bogie. "I didn't know that."

Winters fumbled in his pockets, found an object and flipped it to Bogie. "I bought that off your friend Mosely in Elkhorn Pass. Take a look."

Bogie took off its wrapping of oiled paper and smelled. "Well," he exclaimed good-humoredly, "if you'll pardon my saying so, it looks like soap."

"Yeah," drawled Winters. "Looks like a chip of old Granny Hannah Hibbett's hard lye soap."

Spurlock Mosely spun a silver dollar and snatched his article of sale from Bogannon. "I refuse to be regarded as a cheat. Any time I sell something, I stand behind it; there's your dollar, Winters."

"Now, now, no hard feelings," Bogannon said placatingly. He went for another glass and poured wine all around.

Winters sipped lightly. With a mild shudder he noted that Mosely was staring at his head, particularly its upper half. He turned quickly to Bogie. "Anything of interest happened lately?"

BOGIE SHOOK his head, then reversed himself. "Why, yes: I almost forgot. Early this evening Mrs. Hodge stepped into my saloon. An unprecedented thing, having a woman come in, a good looking one at that. 'Has anybody here seen Orand Hodge?' she asked, staring around like a person distracted. Nobody answered, except that I answered for everybody, including myself. 'What do you mean, Mrs. Hodge?' I asked. She stared at me. 'Why, didn't you know? Orand has disappeared.' *Who hasn't,* I thought, though I didn't say so."

"As a matter of fact, who *has* disappeared?" asked Winters icily.

"I imagine people come and go quite regularly," observed Spurlock Mosely.

"They do," said Bogie.

Winters glanced about. No one else was present. "What became of that gloomy-faced monkey, Doc? Name was Rat's-vein Crowhop, or something like."

Doc reflected. "Oh, you mean Thackery Baine Winthrop. Why, he's been gone ages. Left one evening with you, Mosely, didn't he?"

"Winthrop?" said Mosely. "Yes, I recall that he did. Wanted to buy some of my great medicine. I gave him some—a generous supply. Have heard no more from him."

"Medicine?" said Winters. "Not some more of Hibbett's soap, I hope?"

Mosely had taken out a bottle. After a bit of search he found some cotton, sprinkled onto it a few drops of liquid, pretended to smell. He passed his cotton to Winters. "Nothing deceptive or fraudulent about that, Winters. Take a whiff."

Winters pretended to smell, but didn't. Nevertheless he caught a peculiar, sweet odor. "What is it?"

"Chloroform."

"What's it for?"

"It is used in surgery; makes an operation absolutely painless."

Winters again observed that Mosely stared at his head. "Why do you look at me like that, Mosely?"

"I was merely admiring your beautiful hair. My only brother, Sir Jared Mosely, had hair like that, thick and sort of crinkly." He slid back his chair. "Well, gentlemen, I've had a pleasant evening, but all good things must end. Goodnight." He started out, stopped abruptly and came back. "Who was that you were speaking of a moment ago?"

"Winthrop," said Bogie.

"No, there was another."

"Hodge," said Bogie. "Orand Hodge."

Mosely squeezed his chin. "I just happened to remember something. I believe I know where he's hiding. If either of you would care to take a short ride, I'd show you where to find him."

Winters slapped his hat on. Having his beautiful, crinkly hair stared at was getting to be uncomfortable. "I'll ride with you." He got up and tramped out, nodding to Mosely to come along. Mosely, exalted by what Bogie analyzed as a feeling of anticipated conquest, strode grandly after him.

Then it was that Doc Bogannon had a premonition. He recalled that a glib-tongued traveling salesman had departed with Spurlock Mosely. He recalled that Orand Hodge had departed with this same Spurlock Mosely. He recalled, also, that Thackery Baine Winthrop—

He sprang up. "Winters!"

He rushed out and looked in every direction. "Winters!"

But they were gone.

WINTERS and Mosely rode southwestward across Alkali Flat. Mountains lay in that direction, and canyon walls that closed about them, towered darkly above them. By starlight Mosely and his horse loomed as shadows, more ghostly than substantial, but soft thuds on Alkali Flat had changed to clatter of iron-shod hoofs where canyon rocks replaced desert alkali and sand. Echoes from curving walls broke every sound into fragments, and Winters' nerves jangled with every crackle.

"Well, here we are," said Mosely, halting before an arched cliff-opening. He dismounted. "Here, I am confident, you will find Orand Hodge, or what is left of him."

Winters felt sweat pop out. "What is left of him?"

"Oh," said Mosely casually—much too casually—"after such a long absence from his natural habitat, you would expect some change in him, would you not? Get down, Winters; methinks I see a light back there."

Winters glanced warily about but saw nothing to be scared of. He swung down, held onto Cannon Ball's reins until he noticed that Mosely had ground-hitched, when he let go and followed his escort.

"You seem familiar with this place, Mosely."

"Many places have known my presence—and felt my touch," said Mosely.

What kind of touch, Winters wondered? He did not advance with as brisk confidence as marked Mosely's progress, though their way was over a smooth, hard floor, illuminated dimly by light diffused from beyond a bend. He kept both an ear and an eye to rear and a gunhand alert.

"You wouldn't be holding Orand Hodge a prisoner here, would you, Mosely?"

"Prisoner? Far from it. Dark portals, Winters, are not always pathways to prison; sometimes they lead to freedom. A new, strange kind of freedom, perhaps, yet freedom. And here we are again." They stopped. A brilliantly lighted and oddly furnished cavern opened before them. "My laboratory, Winters. My hospital, my operating room." He turned, looked intently at Winters and added, "And my patient."

"Oh, that is quite right," said a new voice.

Winters had heard or seen no one else. He had been cautious, too; at least he'd thought so. But Spurlock Mosely had seemed so carefree, so incautious, that Winters realized too late how extremely careless he himself had in fact been. Somewhere somebody had stepped behind him and now had a gun in his back.

"My best advice, Winters," said Mosely, "is that you lift your hands. We do not intend to kill you; that would defeat our purposes, but you could easily force us to immediate desperation."

"And do take off your hat," said that new, spooky voice. "I am so anxious to see your lovely hair. No, no, my friend; I shall remove it for you."

"It is my brother, Sir Jared Mosely, who speaks to you," said Spurlock Mosely. "Like myself, he is a famous surgeon. Don't look just yet, because if you make a wrong move—"

Winters did not lift his hands. He felt a jab in his back, heard a sixgun click to full cock. He saw Spurlock's right hand move gracefully and swiftly to an under-arm holster.

"And your reason for being here," said Sir Jared, "is your ownership of a lovely head of hair, which of course, you shall give to me. Your predecessors have made their donations. New lips from dear Hodge; new ears from dear Mr. Fuller; a new nose from poor, sorrowful Mr. Winthrop. And now, from you, Mr. Winters—"

Sweat had streamed on his face. But now Winters was angry, his sweat abated. In a pinch like this, he trusted nothing except his sixguns. These lunatics belonged to a profession which had schooled them in other arts than gunplay, even though he realized but little art was required in pulling a trigger—and but a fraction of time.

Sir Jared had not yet removed Winters' hat. Possibly he had sensed danger and hesitated. Winters waited. If curiosity impelled Sir Jared to remove that hat, Winters would have his chance.

It came, stealthily, cautiously.

"I can wait no longer," Sir Jared said.

Winters discerned a slight change of pressure against his back, a touch on his hat brim, a tug. In that fraction of a second, there was division of attention, of alertness. Winters whirled, came up blazing. Spurlock Mosely had made a complete turn, and his gun divined Winters' move; his gun, too, was roaring.

IN HIS SALOON, Doc Bogannon waited. Lee Winters had been a fine officer, he reflected grievously. Bogie had seen men come and go. He'd learned to look upon death philosophically—generally as no loss to him—and, if mankind's dream of immortality had merit, a distinct gain to some unfortunates who had prematurely lost their lives. But Winters— Ah, here was a man whose passing would leave an empty place. In a few short, swift years he had become a mighty fortress of law and order; without him, Forlorn Gap would long since have become a mere hideout for cutthroats, lunatics and thieves. Wherever he hit, he made a dent; he'd been a man's man, his cold sarcasm notwithstanding, and his deadliness.

Bogie waited an hour. A stagecoach pulled in from Elkhorn Pass, stopped briefly at Goodlett's and went on its way eastward. Bogie swabbed his face, walked round and round until his head swam, reversed direction and walked again. He looked at his watch. Two hours had passed.

His batwings swung inward.

"Winters!"

Winters advanced slowly, a pallor on his face. "Get me a sip of wine, Doc."

Doc hurried. They sat down together. "What happened, Winters?"

Winters drank, thought a moment and shook his head free of some of its haziness. "They meant to take my scalp, Doc, peel it off my head and sew it on Sir Jared's head. I had to kill them." He lifted his vest and pulled his shirttail out, exposing a

fresh bandage round his body with a bloody spot above his left hip-bone. "I got it through there, Doc—luckily only a flesh wound—and that Doctor Jared Mosely dressed it—dressed it as he was dying. Cleaned it with an iodine swab, like you'd clean a gunbarrel. Wanted to do it. Insisted. Said he wanted his last act on earth to be one of healing. Sort of gets me, Doc."

"What you're saying sort of gets me," said Bogie.

"Sir Jared Mosely, Doc. Brother to that loony who was here. Spurlock died right off, but Sir Jared lived over an hour. Told some creepy things, too, about Comanches, operations, drugs. Wanted me to breathe that chloroform so I wouldn't feel any pain while he fixed me up. I didn't do it, though I almost wished I had there for a while. And do you know something, Doc? After those loonies were dead, I felt I'd set progress back a hundred years. That is, for a while I felt that way. But, riding back across Alkali Flat, I heard that voice again—that woman's voice. That got me all mixed up." Winters squeezed his forehead and shook his head.

Bogie poured more wine. "Drink, Winters. You're not yourself yet."

"Thanks, Doc." Winters drank slowly, then got up, feeling better. "Well, Doc, let's call it a day. Tomorrow there'll be something else."

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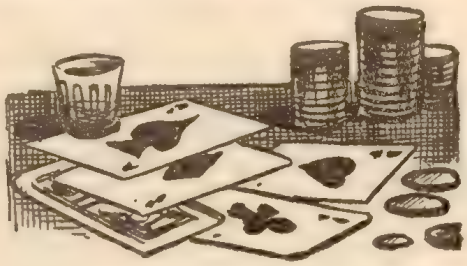
CLAIM REGULATIONS

Fact Feature by Cliff Campbell



INDIAN BAR was one of the many communities in California where miners tried to make their fortunes in the early 1850's. Since there was a limited amount of land and lots of people looking for the precious metal, the mining community made its own regulations about "claiming."

They decided that no man could claim an area of more than forty feet square. This he would "stake off" and put up a notice to the effect that he held it for mining purposes. If he did not choose to work it immediately, he was obliged to renew the notice every ten days. For without this precaution, any other person had the right to "jump it", that is to take it away from him.

However there were many ways of evading the above regulation. An individual could "hold" as many "claims" as he desired provided he kept a man at work on each claim. The worker was regarded as representing the original owner.

Offhand it would seem as though the worker could "Jump" the claim himself. However this was rarely done for a very practical reason. Six dollars a day was considered good wages and at least the worker was sure of that. If he took the claim and tried to work it he might starve to death.

Nearly every Sunday there was a miner's meeting in Indian Bar to discuss problems connected with claims. Generally, arbitration worked better than the six-shooter. And when the pay dirt ran out, Indian Bar became a memory in California's gold past.

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Fact Feature ★ by Harold Gluck

MEET TOM HIGGINS: A Real Westerner

DARWIN should have sent some professors out to the early West to collect material for him. They probably would have all written him the same report: "No place for weaklings! Survival of the fittest definitely proved."

However, you can argue until doomsday about what particular brand of Westerner was really the toughest.

"The cowboy," claims one group, "for he had to have the real he-man stuff in him; hour after hour in the saddle. Fighting rustlers on the one hand and Indians on the other kept him alert."

"The miner," says another group, "was one tough hombre. He went after the precious metal with pick-ax, shovel and six shooter. Just try to jump his claim and see what happened. Your vigilante groups and miners' courts demanded real strong men to enforce their decisions."

"The trapper was the westerner who really lived the toughest life," claims a third group. "He never knew just how long his scalp remained on his head. He had to leave civilization behind and be a jack of all trades."

It is my own opinion that the pioneer who opened up the West was the toughest and roughest kind of a Westerner to exist. And he had to be. When he came into contact with the Indian at that period, it is strange but true, that the Indian often looked down upon his white brother as an inferior. To keep alive, that early pioneer had to actually be able to live at times like an Indian and think like one. And in addition he had to fight Mother Nature for his food, whether he tried to raise some crops or just hunted.

Tom Higgins was a native of Kentucky and he certainly was a good example of the tough pioneer or "backwoodsman" as they were sometimes called. He was a member of a small group called "The Rangers." They numbered just an even dozen and were staying at a small stockade that existed where the towns of Greenville and Vandalia later grew up. The idea was to protect themselves against the Indians. One evening, Joe Simpson gave the boys the bad news.

"Redskins been prowling around the fort. What are we going to do? Stay here until they attack or go after them?"

It was decided to wait until morning and then the party would see exactly how dangerous the situation was. So at sunup, under the command of a young lieutenant, they mounted their horses and started riding. They rode north past the fence of the corn field adjoining the fort. Then they struck across the prairie and rode for a quarter of a mile. In back of them they could still see clearly their little fort. They started to cross a small ridge which was covered with a hazel thicket.

Bang! Bang! went the guns of the concealed Indians who were behind that thicket. And the little party realized they had ridden into a first class ambush. Four of the party were killed including the young lieutenant. One of the Rangers, Fred Burgess, fell from his horse badly wounded. They were outnumbered seven to one. Maybe in a fiction story one of the Rangers would have shouted to the survivors:

"Over here, boys! We'll fight 'em to our last bullets!"

Had they tried to be that type of movie-hero, their scalps would have been around the waists of the Redskins. For this was in the days of those long single shot heavy rifles. The enemy would have rushed them and finished them off a la Tomahawk style. They weren't cowards, just sensible men. It would be a better policy to fight from behind the protection of the little fort. And they assumed that five were dead, not realizing that Fred was still alive.

THE GUNPOWDER in those days left a sort of a heavy cloud in the area. It acted as sort of a screen for the retreating Rangers. Tom Higgin's horse had been shot through the neck. The animal fell on its knees but rose again. Tom had dismounted at first but then he held on to the bridle of the horse to remount it.

"I'd like to account for one Indian," Tom remarked to himself. For this purpose he looked around for a tree from behind which he might fire in safety. He noticed a small elm that would do the trick. As he headed for it that little cloud of gunpowder smoke

broke. And there he spotted a group of Indians who, however, did not see him. Tom loaded his gun, fired, and saw the Indian fall dead to the ground. Still concealed by the smoke, he reloaded his gun, mounted his horse, and headed back for the fort. Suddenly he heard a low voice hail him.

"Tom, you won't leave me? Those redskins will get my scalp." Looking in the direction from which that voice had come, he saw Fred Burgess on the ground.

"I won't leave you! Get over to me and we'll ride back to the fort together."

"I can't come," replied Fred Burgess. "My leg is smashed to pieces. Help me to your horse."

Tom Higgins sprang from his saddle. He lifted Tom up in his hands and then realized something dreadful. The horse would never be able to carry the two of them back to the fort and beat the pursuing enemy. In that second he made a real Western decision.

"You ride back on the horse. Don't worry about me. I'll get back on foot."

As he lifted Fred up into the saddle, the animal bolted and ran away. Still keeping a cool head on his shoulders in this new emergency, Tom Higgins spoke to his friend.

"Get down on the ground and crawl into the side where there is high grass. I'll stay between you and the Indians and do everything I can to distract them." Fred said goodby to his friend and eventually made it back to the fort unnoticed by the enemy.

However, the Indians hadn't yet spotted Higgins and for the moment things looked rosy. He would plunge through the hazel thicket and get away unobserved. He could beat them back to the fort if they chased him. He started to do this but then got a bad break. Fred crawled around and was going through the thicket. Tom had to think again and do it quickly. If he went through the thicket and was pursued, they would get Fred. He doubled back and headed for the other side. He saw three Indians but felt he could outrun them any day. He headed for a ravine and then stopped for a second. His right leg felt damp and almost doubled under him. For the first time he realized he had been shot!

The largest of the three Indians saw Tom Higgins. The redskin then signaled to his two companions and slowly the three of them went after their wounded prey. Tom raised his rifle to fire and found he had a crafty enemy. The Indian would jump from side to side with the deliberate purpose of causing the Ranger to miss. Little beads of perspiration started to drip down Tom's face. He knew he couldn't afford to miss with that single shot. For if he did, the three would rush him and finish him off. Two he could handle in a hand-to-hand combat. But not three. He decided to halt and let the enemy fire. That large Indian came up ahead, and raised his rifle, taking careful aim. Tom looked like a perfect target. But he watched his enemy's eye, and just as he thought he saw the finger press the trigger, he turned to the side. The ball hit him in the thigh instead of the heart.

He fell for the moment and then rose again and started to run. This wasn't such a smart move. For it gave time to that redskin to reload. The three ran after their prey and all fired at the same time. Three balls hit Tom Higgins and he should have been a dead man. The Indians didn't bother to reload. With their long knives and short spears they advanced to finish him off. He arose, lifted his rifle and aimed. He would shift his aim from one to the other of the Indians. But he didn't fire. That tall heavy redskin figured it was all a bluff. That rifle must be empty. Otherwise the finger would have squeezed the trigger before. So he threw caution to the wind and advanced right in front of Tom. He was a perfect target. The eye sighted him to a dot and the finger pulled the trigger. The spirit of that brave

but momentarily careless redskin immediately departed for the happy hunting grounds to join his ancestors.

IT WASN'T exactly a desired situation in which a wounded man should find himself. One enemy dead, two advancing, a whole tribe around the neighborhood; and Tom was carrying a load of lead in his body. Quickly he began to load his rifle. The other two redskins weren't exactly morons. They raised a whoop and charged in for the kill.

"They kept their distance as long as my rifle was loaded," said Tom later, "but when it was empty they became better fighters."

A bloody and fierce hand-to-hand struggle took place. It wasn't in a ring and no holds were barred. Neither were there any rules on how to fight. The redskins stabbed Tom frequently but he did have a good bit of luck. The tips of those spears weren't metal. They just were made of wood and his wounds weren't deep. But he was getting tired.

Finally one of the redskins drew his tomahawk and delivered what should have been the final stroke. The edge sunk deeply into Tom's cheek. It passed through his ear and laid bare his skull to the back of his head. The kind of a job that would have made Poppa Indian comment had he been present: "Well done, my son. You are a good brave."

But Tom Higgins was as tough as they made them in those old days out on the frontier. There he was stretched

out on the ground. The two rushed him to get the scalp. Up went his two feet and he smacked their stomachs where it hurt most. He got to his feet and went for his rifle. Holding it like a club he rushed the nearest redskin and dashed out his brains. The stock broke and all he had in his hands was the rifle barrel.

It was now Tom with a rifle barrel in his hand versus the remaining Indian who had a Tomahawk. Both got the idea in their heads at the same time. Somewhere on the ground were three rifles. Finders keepers!

By this time that little cloud of gun smoke which had separated the side show of fighting from the main Indians just vanished. A number of them crossed the hazel thicket and were in full view. In a few minutes they would spot Tom and that lone fighting redskin.

But at the same time the men in the fort were getting a clear picture of this one-sided fight. They were only six in number and also a heroic woman, Mrs. Ethel Pursley. When she saw poor Tom with the odds against him she shouted in anger.

"Get out there and rescue him before it is too late. They'll get his scalp."

They weren't cowards, those few remaining Rangers. One of them merely remarked.

"They outnumber us ten to one now. Just waiting for us to get outside the fort. We can't help Tom."

"And you call yourself men?" she taunted them. "You can't stay here and let Tom be killed."

Not one word was said in reply. They liked Tom but knew it was useless to try to help him. So Ethel Pursley turned to her husband. "You have your rifle in your hand. Get on your horse and save Tom."

JONATHAN PURSLEY was a brave man. Perhaps he was even a bit henpecked. But you don't throw away your life like a fool. So he said nothing. Then that lone woman made

frontier history. She grabbed the rifle from the hands of her astonished husband and dashed out of the fort. She mounted a horse and taunted the Rangers.

"Guess it takes a woman to show those redskins a thing or two!"

Nothing is more painful than to have a woman show you up. So out they ran, rifles in hand, and onto their trusty mounts. At last rescue was on its way!

The Indians finally spotted Tom and hurried over to the scene of his greatest fight. But Tom only had a limited amount of blood in his body. He fainted and was out cold on the ground. The survivor of those three redskins was still looking for a rifle. All he had to do was use that Tomahawk and finish the guy off.

The mounted Rangers, with Ethel in the lead, got there before the rest of the Indians. One of them lifted Tom up into the saddle and headed back to the fort. They made good their escape and as far as I know, that lone Indian might still be looking for a rifle on the ground.

For several days poor Tom was unconscious. His friends took good care of him. They extracted all of the balls except two. The tender hands of Ethel probably helped him to recover in a short time. Were this fiction, Jonathan Pursley would have died in a month. Then Ethel and Tom could have married. Later Tom married another woman, and was happy with her. His reputation as a tough frontiersman was just 100%. Eventually with the aid of a sharp razor, he operated on himself and removed the other two balls.

In those frontier days of our country, it really was a case of the survival of the fittest. The growing West wasn't a healthy place for a weakling. There was no coming off second best in a struggle. Life was sharp and to the point. Either you came off the victor, or else...

★

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There are times when it pays to wait, and Old Seth and his partner figured that this was one of these times...

A TRAP FOR A SKUNK

by Lew Smith

OLD SETH JONES was sharpening a chisel. He sat on the old grinder, pedalling up and down, chisel pressed against the sandstone, when the shadow fell across his work.

Scowling, he glanced up at Big Vance Emery.

"Somethin' on your mind, cowman?" the old blacksmith asked, voice showing his dislike of the blustering cowman.

"You got any tombstones, ol' man?"

Old man, eh? Seth Jones bridled his anger—hell, he was *only* seventy-two. He looked at his old crony, Bat Catlett, who sat on the anvil, across the old blacksmith shop.

Bat Catlett, a thin man, chewed tobacco slowly, eyes wary. He had no love for this big loud-mouthed cowman, either. Things had been peaceful on Hondo range until Big Vance Emery and his tough trailhands had bought the old Horseshoe outfit, two years ago after the original owner had died.

Seth Jones stopped pedalling,

seamed eyes studying the cowman. Big Vance Emery's bluff face showed anger. Seth looked at Bat Catlett, who had suddenly stopped chewing tobacco, mouth opened slightly.

"You need a tombstone?" Seth asked.

Big Vance Emery snarled, "Sure, I want one, you ol' goat. My time is valuable. *Have you got any tombstones?"*

Occasionally, the old blacksmith, who had been a stone cutter when a boy in Vermont, bought a tombstone or two, but lately, because of his gnarled and trembling hands, he had done very little stone-cutting—cutting names in marble demanded too much of his energy and it also demanded steady hands.

"You figger on dyin', Big Vance?"

Evidently the old man had asked the wrong thing. For Big Vance Emery's ugly face became even meaner-looking. With the back of his hand, he hit the old man across the chest spilling him from the grindstone seat.

Old Seth Jones landed sitting down in the dust of the blacksmith shop's dirt floor. He was more surprised than hurt. His partner, old Bat Catlett, who was seventy-six, started up from his seat, a ball-pion hammer in his claw.

"You can't hit him like that—"

Seth Jones, sitting on the ground, said, "Watch yourself, pard. He's got his .45 out."

Big Vance Emery stood there, the Colt in his paw, a wide smile on his face. "You two ol' buggers don't like me one bit," he said leeringly. "You don't cotton to me, or to my riders—"

"Gunmen, you mean," Seth Jones corrected.

"I came here peaceful like," the cowman said. "All I asked for was a tombstone. You got huffy with me, you two ol' broken-down bone-spavined relicts. I gave you a chance to make some money. Instead, you insult me. For the last time, Seth—have you got a tombstone on stock?"

The six-shooter moved from one old timer to the other. Seth Jones got to his feet and stumbled into an old rocking-chair set a safe distance from the forge. Maybe he was getting old, at that—his bones were stiff and the fall had hurt him. Anger flared through him—anger directed at this overlording cowman. With this was curiosity. The curiosity won.

"I got one tombstone, Emery."

"How big is it?"

"Weighs about two fifty, I guess. Got it in the back room."

"Lemme see it."

Big Vance Emery holstered his gun. His crooked smile was meant to be patronizing, but it far missed its mark. With Old Seth going ahead, the cowman and the old timer went into the store-room at the far end of the blacksmith shop.

"Where is it?" the cowman demanded.

Old Seth dug around, moving an old tarp. He had ordered the tombstone for Max Myers' little girl's grave. But, at the last moment, the Myers family had shipped the body back east, and the company had shipped him the tombstone before he could stop the order.

"Not very big," the cowman said, squinting at the tombstone. "But it'll do. How much is it?"

"Unengraved, fifty bucks. With engraving, more—ten dollars a name." Again, anger touched the old blacksmith. "You want your name on it, Emery?"

"Don't get funny with me—"

"What name do you want?"

They had returned to the blacksmith shop. Bat Catlett listened, head cocked; his hearing, of late, had not been too good.

"Engrave *Johnny Graham's* name on it," the cowman said.

AFTER THE arrogant cowman had left, the two old cronies sat and eyed each other, neither speaking for some minutes. Then it was Bat Catlett who broke the silence with "So it has finally arrived. He aims to kill Johnny. We cautioned that young

feller about squattin' on Timber Crick grass, right in the middle of Big Vance Emery's choice range."

"The young never lissen to the old," Seth Jones reminded sadly.

"Hell, we ain't old, you fossil!"

"Maybe you ain't," Seth Jones said sourly, "but I am. I hurt my right hip bad when that big devil knocked me off thet grindstone. He'll pay for that, even if I have to live to be a thousand to git even!"

"He'll kill Johnny."

Seth Jones nodded, almost groaning. "Johnny ain't no hand with a gun," he said sourly.

"With Johnny dead, what will Vivian do?"

This time, old Seth Jones did groan openly. Almost twenty years before, a couple of actors—man and wife—had come to Hondo City, and had put on a show. The man, sick with tuberculosis, had not been able to travel on; he had died inside of a week, and his wife a few weeks later was killed in a team runaway, for she had taken a job as a cook at a local ranch, and had been driving to town for supplies.

That had left the couple's baby daughter, Vivian, without a home. And Seth Jones and Bat Catlett had raised the little girl to become a lovely woman.

Vivian had been sixteen when a young man, one day, had driven into Hondo City with four horses hooked onto a grain-wagon loaded with farming machinery. Johnny Graham had looked at Vivian Smith. And Johnny had liked what he had seen.

Evidently the same bug bit Vivian at the same time. So Johnny had taken up a homestead and he and Vivian had married. Now, they were expecting their first baby. Old Seth Jones and Bat Catlett were expecting the baby, too.

Now, it looked as if the baby would never see his or her father.

"We gotta keep Emery from killin' Johnny," Bat Catlett said, biting off a fresh chew, " 'Cause if he kills Johnny, the shock will just as well kill off Vivie, too."

Old Seth Jones creakingly got to his feet. "Don't talk that way," he said hurriedly.

Bat Catlett lifted his arthritic-swollen hands, the knuckles distended. "I cain't even bend my fingers aroun' a gun."

"I tremble so much, I couldn't hit the rump end of a jackass if he was hooked to a wagon," Seth Jones said.

"We'd best hook the mule to the buggy an' go out an' see Vivie," Bat Catlett said, still looking at his useless fingers.

●

Spring was visiting Wyoming. Grass was green, crocuses were blooming in the grass, but the beauty of this high rangelands was wasted on the two old timers. Old Seth Jones drove, with Betsy trotting along between the shafts.

They came to Johnny's homestead.

"He's a hard worker," Bat Catlett said.

They saw a three-strand barbwire fence, straight as a die. New diamond-willow posts, shiny wire. Johnny had a section under fence. He was at the far end of the farm, plowing some wheat land.

Betsy trotted into the yard.

Vivie was hanging up clothes. She said, "Oh, my two fathers, eh?" and hugged each and kissed each.

"You're gettin' fat," old Seth Jones joked.

Vivie said, "Doc says it won't be long now. Come in and have some lemonade, you two."

Seth Jones shook his head. Bat Catlett stood with tightly compressed lips. Vivian knew them well, and immediately she read something wrong.

"What have you two got to say?"

Bat Catlett looked at Seth Jones. "You tell her, Seth."

Stumblingly, the old blacksmith blurted out his story. Vivian's hands knotted her worn apron, and her al-

ready-motherly face took on an agonized expression.

"Oh, heavens!"

"So, he ordered us to make the name on the tombstone," Seth Jones finished, his voice not too steady. Damn old age! Even made a man's voice break down sometimes!

Hurriedly the trio held a council of war. They had to keep Johnny from going to town. Big Vance Emery had his office in the *Broken Cinch Saloon*. If Johnny went to Hondo City, Big Vance would jump him.

"Big Vance will get word to him about the tombstone," Seth Jones affirmed. "He's the mean dirty type, who likes to crow about the mean things he does...or intends to do..."

"Maybe we'd best notify the sheriff, over at the county seat?" Vivian was clutching at a straw. "He might make Big Vance Emery back water."

Seth Jones shook his bald head. "The sheriff is an Emery man. Emery'll make it look like a fair an' square gunfight."

"But, Uncle Seth— Johnny is no gunman. He's a farmer boy, born and raised in Ohio— He can hardly hit anything with a .22 rifle!"

"It'll be suicide," Bat Catlett chimed in miserably.

"Sure, but try to convince the sheriff of that." Old Seth Jones peered toward Johnny who had reached the end of the furrow, and was resting his team. A rider loped across range, heading for Johnny.

"I'll get the field glasses." Vivian, despite her bulk, made good time getting into the house. She looked through the glasses and the two oldsters watched her face for expression.

"One of Big Vance Emery's cowhands, the one called Jiggy," she said, handing the glasses to Seth Jones. "Emery's sent him out to tell Johnny about the tombstone. Johnny will be hoppin' mad; he'll want to head right into town. He has a terrible temper."

Old Seth gave the glasses to Bat Catlett. He himself had not been able to identify the rider, even with the aid of the glasses. Yet he said, "Jiggy, sure as shootin'...eh, Bat?"

Bat Catlett couldn't see him either but he said, "Jiggy, I'd say. Yep, him sure as hades, people."

Suddenly Vivian stormed, "Think of the evilness of the man— Getting a name put on a tombstone even before a man is dead!"

"Johnny's name ain't bin engraved yet," Seth Jones muttered.

JIGGY AND Johnny talked, and then the Emery rider galloped away. Johnny unhooked his team and came to the house, riding one of the work-horses. Seth Jones saw that the young farmer's handsome face was pale.

"Emery just sent Jiggy over to tell me he'd ordered you two to carve my name on a tombstone," he told Seth Jones and old Bat Catlett. "You ain't got my name cut out yet, have you?"

"No," Seth said.

Johnny stripped the harnesses from his sweaty work-horses and turned them loose. "Then don't," he said. He started for the house. "Go back to town and engrave Emery's name on it, Seth."

He went into the house. Vivian was almost ready to cry. Old Seth Jones had a hard lump in his throat as he looked at Bat Catlett. Johnny came out carrying a Winchester rifle and with a .45 strapped around his lean flanks. The gun looked out of place, the holster too far back on his thigh.

"Where you going?" Vivian grabbed her husband, a hand on each arm as she twisted him around.

"To town. To kill Emery, of course."

"But he's a gunman— He'll kill you, husband!"

Johnny doggedly shook his head. "It's either him or me. For two years, this has dragged along—now it's time for a showdown, for once and for always."

"But think of me!" Vivian was

weeping now. "And of our child, Honey!"

Johnny's boyish eyes were mature pools of pain. "That's all I have thought about, Vivie. But, I got to go —or he comes for me, so Jiggy said."

Seth Jones' gaze met that of Bat Catlett.

"Your hand is steadier'n mine, Seth."

Johnny's back was toward Seth, who lifted the big .45 in both hands. He brought it down across Johnny's head.

Then, eyes misty, he stared down at the unconscious youth.

"Sure hope I didn't hit too hard," he muttered, wiping his eyes.

They tied Johnny hand and foot, gagged him, and locked him in the root cellar. Then the old timers again got into the buggy and headed for Hondo City. This time, they pushed Betsy hard, even making her lope over level stretches.

"I kinda hate to kill a man," Bat Catlett said.

"Either him, or Johnny. And I'd rather see *him* die. He's threatened other settlers. He don't own that grass —that's gover'ment land. Johnny an' them other three farmers own their land legally."

"Still, he's a man, Seth."

"I doubt it. A killer, is a better definition."

"What if our plan don't work?" What if it doesn't kill him?"

"I'll shoot him through the head myself, an' go to the gallows to save Vivian and her baby—their husband and father."

Old Seth's voice was granite hard. His mind was made up. Bat Catlett nodded, said solemnly, "Them is my sentiments, too."

They reached town, unharnessed Betsy, and put her out to pasture. The day was changing to dusk. Together they dragged the tombstone out of the store room into the blacksmith shop.

Just then, Big Vance Emery came into the shop. "When will it be ready, men?" he wanted to know voice authoritative.

The man's eyes moved from one oldster to the other. "You boys took a trip this afternoon, eh?"

"You see everything," Seth said sourly, sizing up the tombstone.

"Either I see it...or one of my hired sets of eyes see it," the rancher said. "He talked with Jiggy. Then he went to the house where you fellows were blahing with his wife. What happened?"

By mutual agreement, the old partners had agreed Seth Jones would do that talking. And the blacksmith looked genuinely mad as he said, "We argued! He's bullheaded as a Hereford bull during fly time!"

"He out-voted you, eh?" Triumph edged the cowman's voice. "When is he comin' to town to git killed?"

"Sundown," Seth Jones said.

The shrewd eyes of Vance Emery moved from man to man. "You two ol' devils must've seen the light. He's mean an' selfish an' it was about time you busted with him. When will you have his name on thet tombstone, Seth?"

"Inside of an hour."

Big Vance Emery squinted at the tombstone. "You'll have to cut it right fast to git it done inside a hour. eh?"

"Not much work, if you know how."

The cowman consulted his thick watch. "Now six thirty five. I'll be in at seven thirty five sharp, an' that'd better be fixed proper. I wanna put it on public display for a spell afore we use it."

"It'll be ready," Seth agreed.

This time, the cowman smiled. "Good to hear you two ol' fossils got some sense into your haids at last. In fact, I'm kinda sorry I knocked you on your sitter today, Seth."

"You don't need to be," Seth Jones said stiffly.

THE COWMAN stalked away, boots jarring the sidewalk. Quick-

ly the old timers went to work. Seth got some pulleys, he screwed some lag screws into timbers, and finally the platform was over the door, a rope fastened to it. The rope ran across the door, about a foot high.

Anybody entering would trip over the rope.

Bat Catlett tried it, the trap worked. "Just like a figure four box trap, like we used to use to catch rabbits in."

"We're catchin' a skunk," old Seth Jones reminded testily.

They had a hard time getting the tombstone on the ledge over the door. They stood on benches; they pushed, they tugged; they puffed and panted. Finally, the heavy marble was balanced on the board.

"Think it'll work, Seth?"

"It's *got* to work."

"If'n it don't, Johnny'll be dead." The old man studied the rigging, barely discernable in the gathering dusk. "What if it don't hit him smack on the head?"

"If it just knocks him out, I'll kill him with a club."

The ferocity of Seth Jones' voice must have shocked Bat Catlett, for he gave his partner a sudden side-glance before steel entered him, too, and made him say, "And I'll help you!"

Seth Jones checked the rope. It was at the right height, he figured. Then, he looked at his old watch, lighting a match to see the face. "Got five minutes," he said.

He and his partner went into the storeroom. Through knotholes they watched the door. Time dragged by with very slow feet. Dogs barked and children ran and played. All Seth could see was the tombstone, perched on the ledge. And because of the darkness he couldn't see it very well.

Muscles in his old legs threatened to grab him in pain. He hated what they were doing—it was against his morals, his principles. Still, Vivian was *his* girl—*his and Bat Catlett's*—and Johnny was the father of her unborn baby.

He was doing this for Vivie. Vivie, who had come running home from school to her uncles, report card in hand, pigtails flying. Who had come in, panting and excited, to show them the 100 mark on the report card.

Odd, the things—the good things—that a man remembers.

"Here he comes," Bat Catlett whispered.

Gnarled hands trembling, old Seth Jones reached out, fastening his old fingers around the handle of a hardwood club, a lethal implement even in his faltery grip. Eye glued to the knothole, he watched, forgetting his leg pains.

A dark shadow—the shadow of Big Vance Emery—filled the doorway.

The shadow stopped, right outside the door.

"He ain't—comin' in," Bat Catlett whispered, agony in his voice.

Big Vance Emery stood there, peering into the dark blacksmith shop. His bull-like voice echoed through the old frame building.

"Where are you ginks?"

Old Seth Jones kept his voice as

level as he could. "In here, Big Vance. Back here by the forge."

"Oh."

The big man moved forward. With held breathing, the two oldsters watched. The club was heavy in Seth Jones' grip. He saw Big Vance Emery's right foot hit the rope.

The man stumbled.

"What the—"

Big Vance Emery did not finish his sentence. The tombstone fell straight down. By luck, his head was right under it. He possibly never knew what hit him. The sound made by his head was that made by the cracking of a ripe pumpkin.

"We got him, Seth!"

Hurriedly the old timers ran forward. While Seth's trembling hand found the big man's wrist, old Bat pulled away all incriminating evidence —the pulleys, the board, the ropes.

He threw them in the storeroom.

Old Seth stood up, eyes somber in the darkness. "He's dead, chum. Johnny and his wife—they're safe."

"We'd best get out of here."

The two oldsters were making-believe of playing cards in the saloon when the man rushed in with the news that Big Vance Emery was dead.

"He done walked into the blacksmith shop! Then he must've felled, 'cause his head hit thet tombstone. Ol' Seth! Busted his skull wide open!"

"Well, I'll be dad-muffled, Ben!"

A farmer stood open-mouthed. "He's dead? Good riddance of bad rubbish! Bet them would-be gunmen of his run like sagehens now with their boss dead!" The farmer whirled on old Seth Jones and Bat Catlett. "Did you have Johnny's name on thet tombstone, Seth?"

"Hadn't engraved it yet."

"Whose name you got cut on it?"

"Nobody's."

The farmer chuckled. "Then cut a name on it, an' I'll pay you fer it, old timer. An' make the name thet of *Big Vance Emery, eh?*"

★

The bonus player has been a headache ever since the practise of handing out big blocks of dough to promising youngsters, just for signing a contract. Mr. Anderton polishes up his crystal ball, and offers a bit of hoped-for prophecy, in this tale of a

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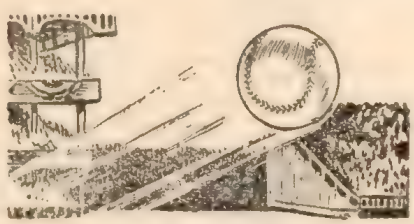

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THE LARIAT

FACT FEATURE

by H. C. Eaton

WHAT IS a lariat? As a matter of fact, there's no such thing. The word "lariat" is a confused and abused term borrowed from the first (and best) cowboys on this continent: the vaqueros. Y'see, their ropes were made of rawhide. They called them reata, or reatas. and when talking about them they were referred to as "la reata", meaning "the rope". From ignorance alone, the gringos assumed that the term "la reata" meant a rope, so with customary gringo indifference, they began calling their hemp ropes "lariats." In other words, then, what you're saying when you talk of your lazo as a "lariat", is simply this: "that is my 'the rope'."

Actually, what most gringo cowboys have dangling at the swells of their saddles, is what the vaqueros called a "pita". Briefly, a hemp rope. You'd be a damned sight closer to being correct if you called your hemp rope a "pita" than if you called it a lariat, but I'll bet a fat steer in the Fall nine out of nine riders who heard you wouldn't have the faintest idea what in hell you were talking about.

I don't suppose it really makes much difference, though, because common usage, in time, makes a word correct and in over eighty years, this common error has come to be recognised as the accepted term for the cowboy's rope.

But speaking of ropes, there's a whale of a lot of difference in them, too. In the first place, the vaquero of the early days not only carried and used a reata anywhere from forty to seventy-five feet long, but was miraculously accurate with it. Those old timers, recognised by such men as John C. Fremont as the best horsemen the world has ever produced, barring none, and that includes today's cowboys, had only contempt for riders who carried a rope under forty feet in length. The modern thirty foot rope was a laugh to them, then, as it is to their descendents today.

The making of a "reata larga" was a matter of grave importance and ritualistic pride. Sometimes this labor extended over many weeks and, depending on the length of the desired finished product, required from one to two large hides. The procedure was

essentially the same throughout the pre-gringo Southwest and, like many other traditional systems carried over from those olden times, has never been improved upon for the simple, succint reason that it can't be made any better.

Normally the hide was taken from a critter, cow or steer, seldom a bull, that had died from extreme poverty. In drought years these aren't too difficult to find, but it helps if you get on the spot soon after death. Skin the carcass, drag it home and soak it in water until it's pliable. Stretch it out after it's workable and peg it out with four, some reata larga vaqueros use six stakes, or even eight, the number you use is up to you, but be sure you get it stretched good and tight. The usual procedure is to drive the whittled stakes through the ankle and lower rib edges of the hide. These parts aren't used in the finished reata anyway, therefore you're not damaging anything you'll need later.

Now then, get on your knees, because this is the hard part. Start from the outer edge on one side of the hide and begin to cut a strip going around the hide, circle like, but don't go up onto the back too far because, as you'll see in a minute, the back leather is pretty thick and won't work out too well. In fact, some reata makers cut a couple of strips about two inches wide straight down the back before they even start to make their reatas and work these tough, thick strips up into latigos. This system is all right, except that then you have to make and drive new pegs along the cut off section to hold the hide to the ground.

ANYWAY, just keep cutting first one side of the hide, and later, the other side, in that same spiral, narrow strip, going around and around, until you run out of hide. Never include neck or leg hide. They're too 'fleshy', stretch easily and have no strength. When you're arm's about to drop off and you've run out of hide, and the confounded flies have about driven you insane—they won't light on your nose or in your ear until you're using both hands on your knife—you'll find that you have two great long strips of green hide running, possibly, seventy feet long. Now, if you're making a real reata larga, you'll want it at least sixty feet long, so you repeat the process until you have four seventy foot strips but, if you're like most of the modern cowboys, you'll figure thirty feet is long enough, in which case, dump your green strips in a tub of cold water and leave them in there for two or three days. Long enough for them to get real soft.

After the strips are slimy-soft, take them out of the water and scrape whatever hair is left on, off. Get them good and clean but be darned careful here, for one slip and you've got the whole chore to do over again. Some makers splice breaks, but I've yet to see a spliced reata that stayed in use very long. A spliced reata has lost two of the prime assets of any lazo. Strength and balance.

Now, you have two great long strips of green hide, clean as an elk's tooth and ready to work. As you know, it takes four strips to make a reata, so now you measure your two lengths, making plumb certain that you've got 'em even, then cut them in the center and, lo, you have the four strands.

One of the most common errors of reata makers the first time they tangle with a green hide is to get careless when they come to the skiving; or equalising the strands. Naturally, you don't want a lazo with a hump in it every few feet, so you've got to cut the hide strips so that they are uniform in thickness. This is usually done by stabbing your sharp pocket knife into a board and driving a large size spike across from the knife blade, making sure that you have the width between the knife and nail the exact size you want the strips to be, then, slowly, carefully, you pull the hide strip through the opening. It's pretty simple if you're knife is damned sharp and you take your time. But don't

forget, a slip here can cause you to start all over again, too.

Now you have four nice, clean and flat strips of rawhide as alike as peas in a pod. If your strips are dry, soak 'em again for a few hours until they are workable, because your next step is to braid them, and useless they're plenty pliable you just can't seem to get 'em tight enough in the braid. Don't let 'em soak long, though, because from now on water can start the green hide to get 'logy' and spongy, which means the damned thing's beginning to 'sour' on you, and a sour hide is no good at all for a reata.

This is probably the pleasantest part of the whole process. It's done best under a big oak tree, where there are no ants around, and with plenty of time on your hands. You just sit down and begin to braid the thing. Pretty soon you'll see your reata sliding past your fingers as an object of utility and grace, where it enters your hand as four scrawny strips of rawhide. Now your lazo is beginning to become a part of the traditional West, and, when you're through braiding it, all you have to do is braid in a hondo, using a whittled piece of bone, a doubled thickness of green, unworked hide, or, as some lazy reata makers do, just double back one end of the coil itself and braid it into a hondo. Personally, I don't think much of this latter system. It doesn't look right and gives no slight added weight like a good rawhide hondo should have. Anyway, the hondo is up to you. At the opposite end of the reata you can braid it back, thus making a "nubbin" end, or you can slit the four strips and make a "rattlesnake" tail end, or, like the fancy old "reata larga vaqueros" sometimes used to do, you can braid in a button or two. However, these damned buttons have always bothered me because they either get crossed over a loop in the cast, thus spoiling a throw, or they're awkward to keep from catching your finger under if you're dallying near the "end of the line." A lot of top notch reata men, and dally men in general, have lost fingers that way. Anyway, here again it's up to you.

Well, your reata's finished now except for breaking in. This is accomplished, usually, by dragging it behind your horse on a good hot day until it has been worked into pretty smooth and pliable shape. Then take a hunk of sheep tallow and massage it good. Work the tallow in and rub it down good. Drag it a little more if necessary, but always finish off the dragging with a good tallow rub, being careful to wipe off excess grease as an oily reata will gather up abrasive pieces of dust that will cut and chew and work as the reata is used until they eventually wear it to shreds.

Well, now that you're finished, do you understand why store "boughten" reatas cost from sixty dollars up? How much would you take for yours? Yeah: I know, that's the way I feel about mine. Sixty dollars wouldn't begin to buy it.

Just one more little pointer. Don't ever use a reata where there's any danger of fouling it on barbed wire. There is nothing quite as sickening as to watch some damned forty dollar critter dart under a barbed wire fence with your reata on him, and watch those beloved strands part and snap and break under the murderous impact of those venemous little barbs.

★

Here's An Unusual Novelet
THE WHITE MAN'S WORK
by Bryce Walton
it leads off the August issue of
WESTERN ACTION

Judge Cain objected to the illegal maneuvers by his fellow townspeople—reversing a verdict of murder against a man because he knew of a rich strike. But all His Honor could do against overwhelming numbers was to fly kites!

ABLE CAIN STRIKES BACK

by A. A. Baker

"Don't come in any farther," Able Cain warned the crowd.

THE SUN had risen over Apex and brought the temperature from a biting thirty-two to a sudden sixty degrees. Ice that had crusted under the dirt began to mush and trickle glassily. The Sierras were brittle with snowcaps. Apex sloped away toward the Bear River like a log-jam ready to slide away into the foaming river, a steep two miles below.

Able Cain, the yawning black muzzles of his shotgun aimed at the feet of the crowd, hitched his overall suspenders across his chunky shoulder. Pike Peel slumped, his spine relaxed

against the hand hewn brick of Quinn's icehouse, his thin face rigidly set, eyes watchful.

"Don't come in any farther." The judge's voice matched his size and boomed until it echoed like the heavy hammering against a quicksilver carboy. The porch of the icehouse was four full steps of heavy timbers and Judge Cain was able to catch the eye of any man in the crowd. Each man present figured that Able's gun muzzles would blast directly at his particular spot.

Several of the crowd turned to a small man seated placidly on the porch of the hotel. He took frequent swigs out of a half-pint bottle and morosely shook his black head. "Nope—no sirree—don't lead nobody to our new strike 'till them varmints lets Jug outa that icehouse."

"There's law to be carried out!" shouted Able. "Even though this prospector, Monty Montgomery, says he's struck a new quartz ledge but won't stake his discovery claim until we release his partner, Jug Crosby. Now—" the judge intoned stiltedly—"that is blackmail. Crosby was convicted, what we call legal, by a miner's jury. Many of you serving that jury are now in this mob, demanding his release."

"Yeah, we done that," a bearded man shouted. "But, we didn't know them boys was sittin' on a discovery of rotten quartz, assayin' at eighteen-thousand a ton." The speaker moved with a sudden idea and yelled. "The Miner's Jury will reconvene!"

A huddle of black-hatted heads dipped together for a few argumentive moments, then the black bearded man stated. "We have reconsidered our decision. We now rule that Jug Crosby is not guilty of the killin'. It was done to the deceased by persons unknown! Now, turn that varmit loose or—"

"Not yet," snorted Judge Cain. "I'll not make a mockery of California mining-country justice. When a man can buy a killer's life with a gold-strike, we'll open a course that'll bring us disrepute throughout the nation. To kill will only mean: can I buy my way clear?" He raised the shotgun as the crowd gathered fury. Their wishes were being denied and the victims were now the judge and his deputy.

ABLE LEANED forward and his shadow was a threat that crossed the faces in the front. "Let me finish! If Apex was a poor camp; if you were starving; or the mines worked out—then it just might explain your actions. But this camp is a hell-roaring success. The hydraulicing is making millionaires of the owners, and wages run into the hundreds per week. Many of you are on shares that load your pockets with coin." He paused for breath and the crowd edged forward.

"The saloons are equal to those of Frisco. Champagne and oysters are..." But Able knew he was beaten. He raised the muzzle and blasted one barrel, the pellets an inch high over the ducking heads. The crowd backed off, then Monty rose angrily.

"Ya yella curs! There'll be nothin' for ya. If ya can't get Jug loose, I'll sit on that strike 'til he is!" He threw the half-empty bottle straight at the judge.

The glass glinted against the sun as it whirled and struck the full face of the judge across the eyes. The glass bottle broke and the yellow liquor spewed down his red face. He staggered, and rammed his elbow into Pike Peel's midsection. The deputy had his gun half out, but his breath was knocked from his body by the judge's lurching fall. The deputy's six-gun exploded into the legs of the rushing mob and one man staggered a few steps, then went down to be stomped by the feet of the men behind.

They reached the judge and battered him against the wall, until his limp, bleeding body was kicked from the platform. Pike Peel slashed with the butt of his gun until the blood

dripped from his wrist. Then, his slender body was hoisted high; passed over the heads of the crowd and flung, like a crushed spider, onto the hotel porch.

The iron door was soon battered down and a grinning Jug Crosby released. He turned sideways to edge out of the broken door, hoisted his huge belly with heavy hands, and tucked in his shirt.

"Now..." Monty mounted the platform and spoke..."if you'll get us a coupla horses and them friends that wish to join us in this new discovery, round themselves some horses and supplies for about four days, we'll proceed to the discovery number one. You can draw lots for the next discovery, right on down the line. Jug and I'll go ahead and plant the stakes."

"Oh, no, you won't!" it was the black-bearded man. "We'll all of us get there together."

"Sure, sure, partners," grinned Monty. "Onc't we arrive near the strike, I meant. That'll be all right, eh?"

A mutter of semi-belligerent agreement rose and the men scattered through the narrow street. Some hurried into the stores for provisions; others raced for the teamsters' corral. The news of the riot had spread into the hydraulic mines on the hill and the nozzles were shut off. The miners rushing to join the new stampede. Hurried, inpatient hands dragged the bruised bodies of the judge and his deputy into the hotel lobby and draped the half-conscious men across a couple of stiff-backed setters.

An hour passed, and Pike Peel opened a swollen eye and stared around the lobby. It was littered. The clerk had snatched a file of bills and scattered them jubilantly. The porter had spilled his mop bucket and hung his mop over the crystal chandelier. The room had started to cool from the dying fire in the round stove. It was so quiet that Pike's long-lobed ears hurt. He rolled stiffly off the couch and limped to the doorway. The street, too, was silent. Across its width a wisp of smoke rose from the blacksmith's forge. The saloon steps were broken, as though a hundred men carrying huge loads of whiskey, had stamped them loose. The teamsters' corral was empty and its wooden bars slid back, their butts in the dirt and yawning upward.

DOWN THE street, the oak door of the Wells-Fargo belled open. The counter was bare, the gray fieldstone building silent. The sign creaked coldly in the chill day. A man, seated in a round-backed chair, studied Pike Peel for a long minute, then rose and shouted. "You stayin' here?"

"Yeah," grunted the spidery deputy. "Me an' the Judge ain't fit to go nowhere."

"Then keep an eye on Wells-Fargo for me," answered the man, already hurrying around behind the building. "She's loaded with dust from the mines. *I'm* gettin' in on the rush!"

Pike Peel nodded and turned back into the lobby. He limped out back, into the clerk's office, and ransacked the desk until he found a whiskey bottle, then moved back to Able Cain's limp form. For long seconds he stared at the man. The judge had a bad gash running across his forehead; the drying blood left him with a puckered half-smile. His overall strap was broken and his red undershirt, torn loose from the white buttons, exposed the red hair of his massive chest. One pant leg was still tucked into his miner's boot but the other was torn halfway to the waist. Pike smiled as he noticed the judge's swollen hands. The skin had burst at the knuckles and Pike knew that several of the mob were nursing broken teeth.

"When you get through staring..." the words were soft and Pike noticed the blue eye was open..."then pour a little of that whiskey into the left side of my mouth." The judge leaned up on an elbow and the whiskey trickled out of the bottle. Each drop bringing a fresh glow of life to the beat-up face. He stared around the lobby and muttered. "They all gone?"

Pike nodded. "An' Jug Crosby with 'em. Even the shotgun guard from Wells-Fargo jest rode out."

"Go up on the Dutch Flat meadow and catch a couple of horses," Able snapped. "We're going along, but we're going to bring that killing man back to jail."

"You don't never know," growled the deputy, "when you got enough."

"When the law is broken, and a man is judged guilty by a fair trial, with all the facts in front of them for a just decision," snorted the judge, "then in *my* book that man stays guilty, regardless." He repeated the word. "Regardless of a changed decision, based solely on the desire for reward. It's pure bribery of the jury. Promise of a valuable mine, for the freedom of a killer."

"Yeah," mumbled the deputy. "But, if I was havin' the say, I'd fix the whole mess...right now. I'd get me a nice torch an I'd walk slow, up an' down the street, an' set fire to every blooming house, store an' saloon. Then, I'd ride out towards Pike County, Missouri, an' never come back!" He moved down the lobby toward the door. "But...you're the judge."

"Just a minute," Able turned stern eyes on the deputy. "Just be sure you leave that bottle!"

THE TWO lawmen rode out toward the Bear River. Behind them the town lay deserted. The smoke from the chimneys had puffed out and the vagrant snap of a cooling wall made lonely protests at their desertion. The trail was plain. Wagon tracks, horse marks, and even the deep ruts of an ox drawn Conestaga.

"Saloon man..." Able nodded toward the ruts..."loaded heavy with whiskey, ready to open up on the new discovery. Canvas walls, pine bar, tin dippers for the whiskey barrel. Half the towns in California were started the same way. Miners don't ever get far from their red eye."

"Suppose they'll be for lettin' us take Jug Crosby back with us?" muttered Pike.

"Once they've stake a claim, you mean? I don't know," the judge said. "But, this time, we'll be ready and every man'll be too busy to do much protesting. They'll be like rabbits in a carrot patch. Rooting and digging."

"Maybe Jug has already run off?"

"Nope, them *citizens*," the judge rolled the word ironically, "will keep close tail on him...till they get to the strike. Anyway," he added, "we'll find out soon for sure."

The judge caught up with the tail-end of the straggling men about sundown. The campfires were blazing a half mile ahead and their glare blossomed smokily into the cold sky. The dark ridges absorbed the light like a huge sponge. He passed the plodding horses at a gallop, urging his horse to a hard run as he noticed the men surge in behind him.

It was an open camp on a grassy flat, a hundred yards back from a churning mountain freshet. The green grass, discolored by the sprigs of dried manzanita bushes, was smashed down by the feet of three hundred men and their equipment. Men rose from the fires and edged into a crowd near the center of the camp. The judge sat his horse and waited silently until all the men were present.

They stared up at the judge. Several clicked their lips sympathetically as they studied his bruised and cut face. Others spat yellow tobacco juice at the horse's hoofs.

"Now, if you're all here," sang out the judge, "I came for Jug Crosby. Don't," he growled the word, "don't underestimate me. I wouldn't ride in here...just to get mauled again."

"You'll get that!" snapped a man from the rear of the crowd.

"Pike's on the ridge," the judge ignored the threat. "He's got a Sharps repeating rifle and these fires'll give him a good outline for shooting. Now, one beating a day is enough. He has orders to kill—and if you could see the mess you made of his face, you'd

know his finger is itching on that trigger. All right; where's Blacky Rogers?" He let his eyes run through the crowd in search of the Miner's Court spokesman.

"Down the ravine with Jug and Monty," shouted a man. "They've taken Blacky to show him the strike. He's to help them set up discovery number one, an' then stake off all four ways from discovery."

"Why...double-damn that Pike Peel!" the Wells-Fargo guard snapped bitterly. "He said he was stayin' in Apex. Now, I gotta get back." He moved toward his horse and a shot rang out from the ridge. The Wells guard staggered and dropped before the echo cleared. He rose groaning.

"Forgot about your damned bushwhacker, Judge. Call him off an' tell him I'm just goin' back to Apex."

"Then go ahead!" The shout floated down from the ridge. Judge Cain nodded and a deep, sullen silence fell as the man mounted and trotted back up the canyon.

"Now..." the judge turned his horse slowly by the hackamore, his words were meaningful. "I'm following those partners and Blacky Rogers. Don't follow..." He urged his horse through the crowd and disappeared around the pinnacle of granite as though riding through an open door. The men moved slowly back to the fires and threw cautious glances toward the ridge.

THE BLACK-BEARDED miner was face down in the water. His shirt bulged wetly, the fabric holding enough air to let his body ripple with the rushing water. The judge dismounted and rolled the body over until the black beard and the staring eyes caught their dead reflection from the waning half-circle of the moon. From about the knife that ridged his chest, blood floated away with the turgid water. Dragging the miner from the water, halfway up onto the gravel of the shore, Able Cain directed his horse along the trail of the partners.

An hour later, the judge crawled along the ridge above the camp and whistled through his teeth. He waited for a few minutes and, when he heard the scrape of rock from behind, turned and snorted. "Took you long enough..."

"Not behind you, Judge," the thin voice of Pike snapped, "that's just the noise of a rock I tossed. Turn around an' come this way."

Pike had concealed his thin frame between two granite rocks. He still faced the camp, a few hundred yards below. Some of the men paced restlessly, but most had settled down and the sparkle of a whiskey bottle passed between the fires.

"What happened?" questioned Pike.

"Blacky Rogers, by reversing the decision of the Miner's Court, got himself killed. Crosby and Monty jammed a knife in his chest then took off south. I followed the tracks..."

"You mean they didn't have no discovery? That it was all done just to loose Jug, makin' folks believe...?"

The judge nodded tersely and continued. "I followed their tracks for a couple of miles, hightailed it south for that distance then lost their trail. They must've rode out of the river bank somewhere below and got into the hard rock."

"Then let's pass the news an' get on back to town," growled Pike, raising to his feet.

"Let 'em sweat." Able's voice raised until the last word sounded like a curse.

"All right, but pipe down!"

"They'll find Rogers' body soon. Then they'll come dragging mournfully back into Apex," the judge gritted. "I want to be there, sitting on the hotel porch, and watch them drag in. Going crazy about a gold strike. Breaking into the jail. Springing a killer! Making a mockery of the minefield laws. Dragging back with a corpse instead of a rich claim. That, I want to see." His blunt fingers tenderly probed his battered face and Pike Peel understood.

They left the dotted fires behind and rode slowly back up the long rocky

canyon toward Apex. The dawn was crisp and the hoofs crunched against the soil ice and the white frost. Trees snapped with the cold and steam rose from the weary, sweating horses as they approached Jefferson Spring that bubbled below the orange trees that some unknown had planted years before.

The sun climbed higher and threw a cold glint into the eyes of the two men as they halted to let the horses poke cautious noses into the cold spring. The wind was beginning to bluster and roiled the water until the black sand burbled to the surface.

A STEADY volley of rifle shots brought the men to attention. The whining slugs ripped down the empty street and brought a fusilage of pistol reports, like a dozen men trying to kill a writhing snake.

"Somepin's goin' on!" Pike ripped out the obvious.

"No doubt..." The judge clambered out of his saddle and hurried up the street. Taking a position behind the corner of the Masonic Hall, he held his hat firm against the cold blast and, kneeling, peered around the stone corner. A dozen men scurried swiftly up and down the street. The Wells-Fargo hitching post held a dozen horses and packmules. The animals were braced and turned until they faced downwind. The body of the guard lay in the doorway and two men hooked his dead hands and dragged him outside and onto the boardwalk.

The bandits were efficient. A sharp explosion, followed by a surge of black smoke, told Able that the Wells-Fargo safe was blown open. The men clustered a few seconds outside the door, for the smoke to be snatched away, then hurried back into the building.

One man hurried into the hotel and others barged into the deserted stores and saloons. Each had a grain sack and they soon reappeared. Each sack weighted heavily now and one man dragged his sack in the wet dirt of the street.

"Let's get up there!" grated Pike Peel.

"They'd cut us down...in a hurry," the judge muttered. "We'll have to figure it out, first. Wonder where they come from?"

"It all ties in," Pike said bitterly. "That Monty and Jug was doin' their act. This was all planned. Get the townsfolk to leave an' then hurry in an' loot everythin'."

"Maybe. But Jug Crosby was in jail for killing a man. Why'd he do that when he would think he'd be hung right off?"

"Because Jug musta had a snort an' got fightin' mean, then done the killin'. That part wasn't part of the plan. So Monty just changed it enough to make the people let Jug out, in exchange for that so-called discovery. It maybe wasn't part of the robbery set-up, but it worked just as good. Them crazy idiots is still sitting down on the Bear with their tongues hangin' out whilst the towns bein' looted." Pike's words jerked in rhythm with his jumpy body.

"I don't believe they'll wait very long," the judge said. "Once we were gone, and Blacky didn't come back, they'd be sending someone to look for him. That means they're heading this way, maybe only a few miles back. If we can turn that gang, so's they head down the River Trail." The judge ducked back behind the building and led the way up over the bank. He gritted his teeth and slipped into the wind pitched water of the miner's ditch. Pike hesitated and Able spat through clicking teeth.

"We got to get above them. This is the only way. Come on in, get your feet wet."

"You got the weight," protested the deputy. "That water an' this wind'll wash me plumb into the Canyon Hydraulic Mine."

"Then get in ahead of me. I'll push you up as far as the flume," impatiently ordered the judge.

"I don't see why we should," was the tart rejoinder. "What're we savin'?

Just somepin' for them varmints that half-beat us to death."

A SCORNFUL look passed over the judge's face as he reached up and hooked Pike's gun belt and the man plopped into the cold spray of the ditch. The howl of the wind, like a giant swatting the trees with a switch, hid the splashing noise of the two men. Pike Peel was sizzling with the rancor of subjecting himself to a miserable wetting for those not deserving such a sacrifice.

They reached the top of the street and scrambled out of the water, feeling their clothes stiffen in the cold wind. The bandit gang was still hoisting sacks of loot onto the restless horses and several pack animals were loaded with bulky objects. The street was a funnel and bits of paper and dust from a Chinese market garden billowed in racing puffs of red dirt. A hogshead garbage can rolled eerily back and forth. The rush of wind would die and, in a sudden silence, the mighty roar of the Bear would echo mournfully up the canyon. High overhead, the white clouds gathered and were ripped apart by high gusts.

"We'll use that garbage barrel—" Able grunted and pointed to the Elder Print Shop. "Rake out an armful of full sheets that Joe's got laying around. I'll keep an eye on the progress of our friends hauling away the damned town." Able huddled down out of the wind and shivered in his wet clothes, while his deputy slithered into the printing shop.

"What are they doin'?" Pike was suddenly back with his armful of cards, the size of newspaper pages. The ribbed cards were light, but stiff with gloss.

"They're having a drink in Buster Sharon's saloon. Taking their time, just like moving men working by the hour," answered Able and began to fold the cards into pointed sails. Pike Peel squirmed around like a puppy worrying at pants legs and trying to get out of the wind.

"Dang it, I'm freezin'! Let's go right in."

"That's the easy way," was the patient answer. "Then we'd do all the fighting and, two against twelve, is danged foolish odds. Let's do it the hard way, drive them twelve into the three hundred that's coming back from their wild-goose chase. They'll be mad enough to do some real fighting. There." He suddenly whipped out into the street and sailed the paper into the air.

It dipped and the draught caught. The cardboard sailed out, rose, then dipped again, fluttering like a slapping ghost against one of the bandit's pack horses. The animal reared and the other horses stamped restlessly.

Pike joined the judge and they let more sails loose. The wind carried them on their wobbly way down the street and, slapping against the buildings and bouncing around, caused a turmoil among the tethered horses. One horse reared and his front hoofs struck the pack on the nearest pack animal. More white cards rose on a gust of wind and the horses stampeded. They tore loose from the hitching posts and, tails blowing over their churning legs, raced down the lower end of the street.

Startled, the bandits assembled in a worried group around their leader. He shouted, and a man ran for the empty teamsters' corral. His desperate reply could be heard by the two lawmen. "The corral's empty. Ain't a horse left in the place!"

"Then we'll run them down afoot," was the command. "They've got all the coin an' everything." He led the gunmen down the boardwalk on the trail of the skittish horses.

The curses of the bandits brought a smile to the judge's lips. "It's their turn now," he said and frowned down on the cracks and bruised skin of his hands.

"Who do you mean by 'their'?"

"Them miners and them bandits. We've done our share. The bandits won't know the miners are returning

and the miners won't know about the bandits. Wish I could see the meeting but I'm for getting a cold drink of hot whiskey and changing clothes. How's that sound, Pike?" The judge stepped out toward the Hotel.

"Got a better idea," Pike trailed along, "we'll get them clothes an' the bottle, then we'll climb onto the hotel roof an' watch the fight. Y'can see the white water of the Bear from the roof an' about three-fourths of the Canyon Trail."

FROM THE roof, they caught glimpses of the horses drifting ahead of the bandits. They could see the long line of returning townsfolk. The rush of wind through the trees dimmed the noise of any human movements and the two groups met in an open flat below Jefferson's Spring. The bandits ragged gunfire drifted back to the roof top, then, like a massed fire drill of the British Redcoats, the townsfolk opened up. The bandits crumpled and several raced for the cover of dense underbrush.

The mounted citizens herded them out of the manzanita like a Mexican vaquero bringing in beef cattle. The body of men grouped. Shouts could be heard and five men, survivors of the volley, were suddenly jerked high into the air by ropes. The loose ends were tied firmly to the tree trunks and the black line of men moved on toward Apex.

"No respect at all," moaned Able Cain. "Hanging without a trial."

"Them fellas had it comin'," Pike said cheerfully. "Let's get down by the fire." He dropped waist-deep into the trap door and added. "Don't forget the jug."

A melee of stomping horses and men sliding from creaking saddles in front of the hotel, brought the judge and Pike to the doorway.

As a man stepped forward, the judge rapped out. "Well, Janas, who're you aiming to hang now...without trial?"

"We come to see you," the Scotsman answered. "Our tempers and the bloody lust for gold led us beyond decent behavior. We tromped on our elected judge and Deputy. We're mighty contrite and have agreed to follow your advice in things legal."

As the man talked, Judge Able Cain's face reddened.

"We ha' captured the varmints we broke from jail." He turned and pointed dramatically to two bound men. Monty Montgomery and Jug Crosby still sat on restless horses. Their hands were looped with rawhide straps.

"Isn't that just mighty nice!" roared the judge. "Brought 'em back, eh? *After* they killed Blacky Rogers. What for, a fair trial?"

Several men nodded proudly.

"Then you've seen the error of mob action?" The judge's voice softened a bit. "The law will again make decisions and mob rule is no more?"

A few men straightened importantly and the crowd collectively nodded.

THE JUDGE looked at the two culprits. He let his eyes roam over the crowd then stared hard up and down the street, still littered with refuse and stirred by the restless wind. The judge rose on his toes. He sucked air into his lungs until his cheeks swelled and he bellowed like a mountain lion in a fight with a grizzly. *"Then why'n hell did you hang those five men down there on the flat?"*

Janas Fyfe was equal to the task. "We brung you in two! These is guilty! The others was caught, redhanded, looting Apex. They was guilty! We hung them, and we'll hang these two just as soon as you pronounce them guilty. Of course, that's after you've done your duty and given them a fair trial!"

Janas Fyfe whirled and stamped off and the judge watched the suddenly self-righteous crowd turn toward their homes. He turned to Pike Peel and growled. "Wipe that silly grin off your face!"

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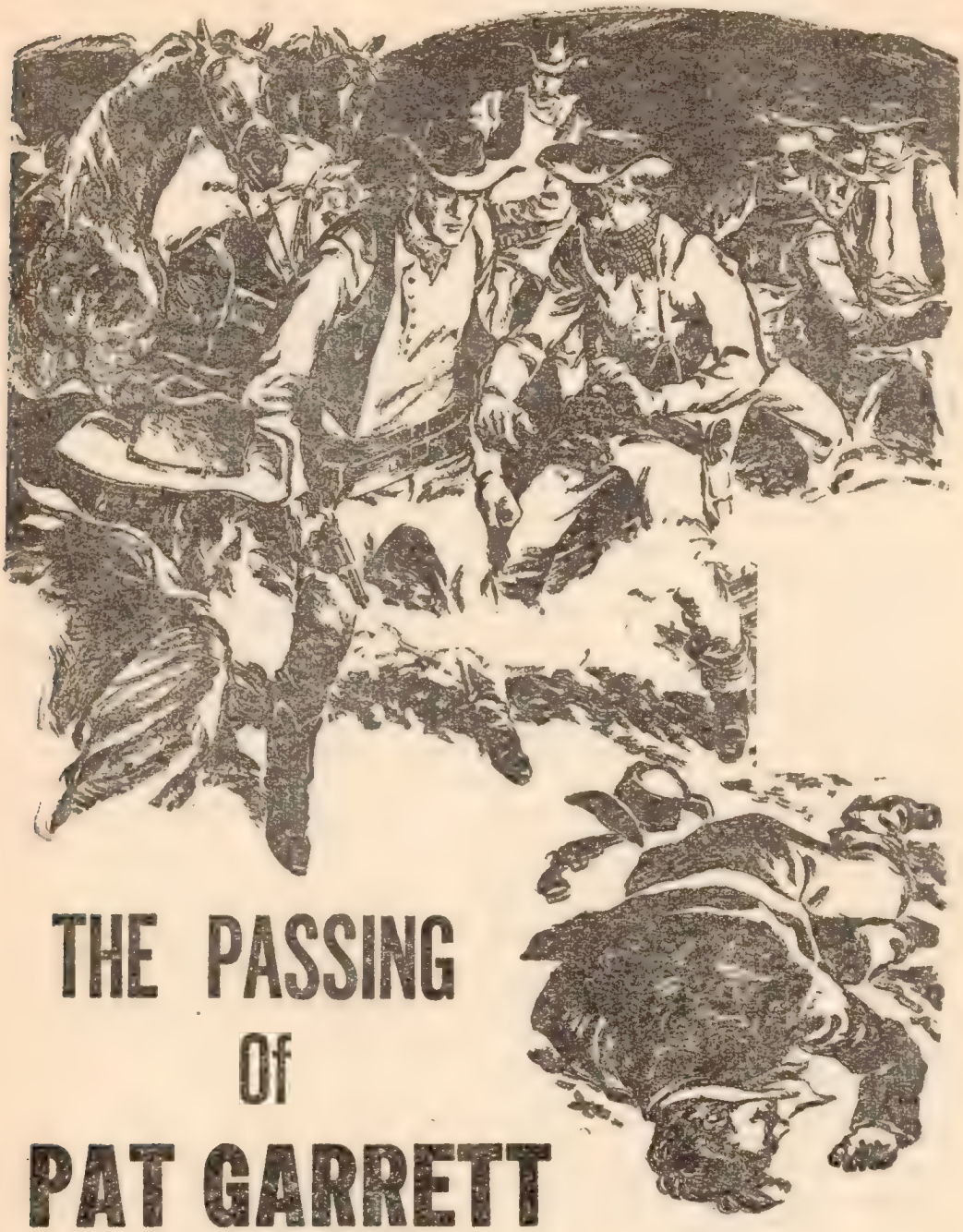
FACT FEATURE ★ by J. J. Mathews



THE PASSING Of PAT GARRETT

THERE ARE few admirers of the old West who are not familiar with the life, deparadations and end of William H. Bonney, known as Billy The Kid.

Billy, by his own account, killed twenty-one men, "not counting Indians or Mexicans, who don't count as people anyway." For the edification of those few readers who are not 'up' on Billy The Kid's method of executing his enemies, the following is a pretty fair example of his willingness to kill.

Billy and his crew stole several hundred head of fat cattle from an old scoundrel named John Chisum over a debt Chisum refused to pay. The outlaws were hurrying their newly acquired charges over El Llano Estacado when Chisum's cowboys thundered out of the distance in hot pursuit. The thieves could not hope to escape from Chisum's men with the cattle, so they turned to fight. In the course of the brief and furious battle, the Kid's men routed Chisum's riders and killed half of them. Chisum's men traded brave pursuit for prudent retreat and left the field to Billy The Kid.

Going among the downed Chisum riders, Billy was calmly dispatching the wounded men when he came upon an old friend, one George Dye (appropriately named), who had received a bullet in the upper leg, while his horse had been shot dead and had fallen on his good leg, pinning him to the ground. Dye had been a good friend of Billy's and when he saw The Kid standing over him, asked that Billy help him out from under the weight of the dead horse. Billy smiled slightly and told Dye to stop moving his head because he didn't want to disfigure his face when he shot.

While The Kid and Dye were talking, several of Billy's partners came up and watched, certain that The Kid was having a little fun at the expense of his old friend. Dye apparently thought so too, because he stopped moving his head. Billy cocked his pistol and took deliberate aim. Dye still wasn't convinced that The Kid was serious and when The Kid squeezed the trigger, George Dye's face held an incredulous look for just a second before the bluish hole appeared in his forehead a little to one side and over his left eye socket. George Dye's head fell against the hard ground and his body went limp.

Billy The Kid's career was bloody, troubled and short. He killed wantonly and indiscriminately and became a scourge that brought terror and uneasiness wherever his name was heard. He himself was finally shot and killed one night by Sheriff P. G. Garrett at a friend's ranch. Barefooted and with his back to the wall, William H. Bonney was shot dead before he ever had a chance to fire the Colt six shooter in his fist.

With the killing of The Kid, Pat Garrett became a local hero and his name and fame spread across the undulating vastness of the untamed West. Garrett had sworn to kill Billy and the fact that Fate had presented him with the opportunity with practically no risk to himself at all was overlooked. Only the final enactment in the drama counted, and that was that Pat Garrett had kept his promise and had killed the notorious gunman. Billy The Kid was born November 29, 1859, and died under Garrett's gun when he was slightly over twenty-one years of age.

Pat Garrett was a lean man with dark hair, rather prominent cheekbones, a thin nose, and a well shaped mouth beneath a thick and prominent mustache. His eyes were deep set, penetrating and cold and had that square appearance that lends the hint of a slight upcurve to the corners that is typical of some types of Southwesterners.

Garrett was a saving man and had acquired a tidy sum of money over the years that he invested in 1250 acres of land a mile or so East of Roswell, New Mexico. For a while Garrett prospered, not so much because of acute business acumen but rather because the country was at that time going through one of those slight booms that typify America.

During the course of this prosperity, Pat Garrett acquired some mining interests and two more ranches. Garrett's future seemed secure at this time, but at the time of his death he was almost broke. Pat Garrett was a frontiersman, like hundreds of others, and when his existence depended on his cunning, courage and ability with a

six gun. He had no fear of the future, but when his primitive qualities were called upon to compete with legalities, abstracts and confining regulations that invariably come to a tamed frontier, he was no match for the new ways at all and fell by the wayside like so many other sterling pioneers.

IN 1907 GARRETT leased one of his ranches to a stockman named Wayne Brazell, who was many years younger than Garrett and a shrewd ranchman. He had originally leased the Garrett ranch for the purpose of running cattle but soon saw that, with the declining prices of beef plus the limited grazing opportunities of Garrett's place, that cattle wouldn't pay out.

Brazell turned to goats and sheep and stocked the Garrett place with them. This didn't sit well with Garrett, who grumblingly told several of his friends that Brazell had broken the understanding that existed between the two men when Pat had leased the ranch to the younger man for cattle.

It is quite possible that the goat and sheep incident would never have erupted into anything more serious than Garrett's distrust of Brazell's word had not Brazell sub-leased the Garrett ranch to some sheepmen. This was the final straw and Garrett wrote Brazell that the latter had no right whatsoever to sub-lease the ranch and demanded that Brazell give up his lease.

Brazell understood that under his lease the ranch was his to operate as he saw fit for the length of time that he had possession of the ranch, and he therefore refused to surrender the lease in very blunt language.

On the morning of February 28, 1908, Pat Garrett and a friend named Carl Adamson hooked up Garrett's buckboard and started out to drive to Las Crucas. They were on the outskirts of a small village called Organ when they met Brazell on the road. Brazell was armed with the customary Colt .45 which hung from his right hip. He was riding a tall bay horse and reined up when Garrett and Adamson pulled up beside him.

Pat Garrett and Wayne Brazell began to discuss the sub-leasing of Garrett's ranch almost before their horses had stopped. There were no preliminaries to the conversation at all. Neither man appeared convinced the other was right. Garrett accused Brazell of breaking his word as well as his lease. It was bad enough to fail to have his cattle on the place as he had originally said he intended to do, but to sub-lease the ranch, and to a sheepman at that, was about as underhanded a thing as Garrett had ever heard of.

The conversation was spirited and Brazell appeared unconscious of Garrett's reputation of being a top-notch gunfighter. Garrett got out of the buckboard and stooped over to replace a leather tug that had come uncoupled. When he straightened up his eyes were blazing and when Brazell showed no sign of giving way before the ex-Sheriff's demands that he forfeit the ranch, Garrett cursed through clenched lips and lunged for a shotgun lying on the floor boards of the buckboard saying that he'd clear Brazell off his property one way or another.

Wayne Brazell was a rancher, not a gunfighter, but he knew how to handle a gun, too, and when Garrett brought

the murderous shotgun off the floor of the buckboard and swung around, Brazell's arm dipped in a flashing motion and his fist came up like a streak of lightning with his six shooter. He fired from the hip. His first shot struck Garrett through the heart and his second shot drilled the slayer of Billy The Kid directly between the eyes.

Garrett was dead before his body struck the ground. He had never had a chance to cock his shotgun—much less fire it. Brazell holstered his smoking .45 and turned to Carl Adamson, who was sitting in the buckboard horrified. He insisted that Adamson ride on into Las Crucas, tell the authorities there exactly what had happened and how the ex-Sheriff had gone for his shotgun first. Adamson complied with the killer's request and five hours later a group of Garrett's friends came out and loaded the stiffening body into a wagon and took it back to town.

Brazell knew better than to hang around Garrett's corpse until his friends came out to retrieve it, so he immediately struck out for Las Crucas and the body lay alone in the roadway for over a half a day until it was carted away.

Brazell and Adamson told the story of the fight at the Coroner's inquest the next day in Las Crucas and Brazell was released under bond. The 4th of May, 1909, Wayne Brazell was formally tried for the murder of Pat Garrett. The prosecution tried to show that Garrett was murdered in cold blood, but there was only one witness, Carl Adamson, and he said otherwise, that if Brazell hadn't fired, Garrett would undoubtedly have killed him. The jury retired and stayed impanelled for only ten minutes when they filed back into the court room and handed up a verdict of not guilty. Brazell was acquitted, they said, because from what meagre evidence was at hand, he had fired in self defense.

Thus passed another of the original gunfighters of the West, the man who kept his oath when he ran for Sheriff, that if elected, he would dedicate his time to just one effort: The extermination of Billy The Kid.

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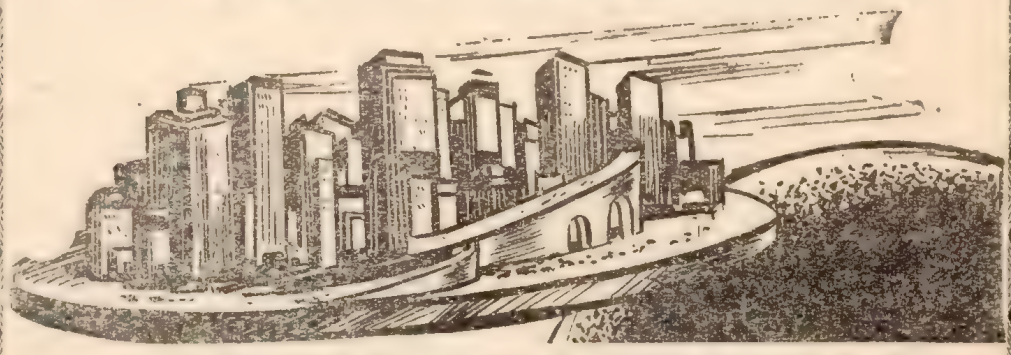
FOR NEW THRILLS — LOOK TO TOMORROW!



Here Are 3 Novelets You'll Want to Re-read!

★ DREADFUL THERAPY by Bryce Walton
★ COMMON TIME by James Blish
★ CHARACTERISTICS UNUSUAL by Randall Garrett

These, and other stories appear in the August issue of

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

Doc reversed the quotation from Shakespeare slightly when he said, "The good men do live on long after they are dead; the bad dies with them". But it wasn't Shakespeare who offered the solution to Doc's dilemma; it was the great Athenian philosopher, Socrates.

LEARN and LIVE

by Richard Brister

JACK STAPP was a mean, hawk-faced gent, with bitter black eyes and a cruel, twisted mouth. "Three-finger Jack" was the name by which the law now knew him. Jack stared bitterly at the dancing flames of his tiny cook fire, cursing his luck, and the gunfight in which he had lost two fingers of his knobby right hand.

Like any tenderfoot, lame-brained fool, he had treated himself to a drunken brawl in Shoshone, shortly after holding up the Barstow-Las Vegas stage. In the *Shoshone Saloon,* a sharp-eyed Deputy Sheriff had recognized him, and ordered him to reach for the ceiling.

Jack had spun like a top and reached for his sixguns instead. The shotgun messenger aboard that Las Vegas coach had put up a scrap, during the holdup, and Jack had killed him. Jack knew if he gave himself up to the law now, he'd dance on a rope before sundown.

"Not this trip, friend," he ground through his teeth at the deputy, and snapped his gun up with desperate haste.

The burly deputy was faster. His gun cracked a split second before Jack's did. Jack felt a sickening stab of pain in his right hand, and knew with a sense of panic that his own slug had missed its target. Even as his right hand gun was dropping to the saloon floor with a clatter, his left gun was booming.

The deputy clapped a weak hand to his chest, and fell like a tree. His head thumped solidly against the brass foot-rail, and one quivering hand rested atop a dirty spittoon.

Jack sucked blood from the shattered fingers of his right hand, fighting a wave of nausea at the taste. He backed through the batwings, keeping the shock-faced bartender covered.

He leaped on his tall red roan, and high-tailed it three miles out of Shoshone before the small desert town even thought of organizing a posse.

He had ridden north to Death Valley Junction, where he had tarried just long enough, on the way to his hide-out gorge in the wild Funeral Range of the Panamint Mountains, to have old, drunken "Doc" Hilliard patch up the bloody right hand.

This hide-out gorge was safe enough, as long as he remained here, but many a morning he woke up, and many a night he lay awake, cursing the impulse which had led him to call on Doc Hilliard. The drunken old sawbones had been forced to cut off two of Jack's shattered fingers, and once Jack rode on, Doc lost no time in shooting his face off about what had happened.

Only once, in the three long months since he'd first holed in up here in the mountains, had Jack dared venture out toward civilization. Three miles southwest of Stovepipe Wells he had come face to face with a reward dodger, promising one thousand dollars for the capture, dead or alive, of "Three-finger Jack Stapp."

Jack stared bitterly at the sign, his hawk-face jerking with angered frustration. He looked down at the dead give-away which was his right hand, and reined the red roan back-trail, toward the hideout gorge, and comparative safety.

And there he had remained, cursing his forced diet of mountain berries and what game meat he managed to kill with his sixshooter, cursing the maddening loneliness of his hermit existence, cursing that fool of a Deputy Sheriff in Shoshone and "Doc" Hilliard and the tall red roan, which cocked its ears intelligently when Jack spoke to it, in desperation, but which could not talk back and provide company for him.

JACK'S MOUTH twisted as he glanced across the small stream, where the hobbled horse was peacefully grazing. "Enjoyin' this kinda life, ain't yuh?" he snarled. "Gittin' fat as a mud-wallowin' pig, yuh damn'—"

He suddenly cut the speech off in mid-sentence, and came erect from his haunched position beside the small fire, cupping one ear up the narrow reaches of the twisting gorge. He could have sworn he'd heard something. He stood motionless, his heart thumping fiercely against his thin ribs, for several minutes.

There. He was sure of it now. The distant clop-clop of a heavily-laden animal's hoofs—a burro, most likely—moving steadily down the gorge toward him.

A hard, hunted look glimmered in Three-finger Jack Stapp's close-set black eyes. Swiftly, he scuffed at the flame, kicking the embers and half-burnt sticks into the stream. He walked over to his saddle, which lay at the foot of a scrubby mesquite, and picked up his cartridge belt and two holstered sixguns.

"A visitor, huh?" he was growling. "Well, I ain't so hard up for someone t' talk to that he'll be welcome. I'll say my howdies t' him acrost the sights of a hogleg!"

●

The clop-clop of the burro's hoofs made a pleasant rhythmical pattern of sounds, echoing and reechoing off the steep side walls of the twisting gorge, and from time to time he glanced back from atop the black mare and clucked encouragement to the sturdy little fellow.

"Come along now, Bag Ears. You just think you're tired."

At which the little fellow snuffled through his nostrils, blinked his brown eyes, and hee-hawed at him.

"Well, then, maybe you are. But so's Dolly. Never could understand why a horse is so willing, and you little monkeys are always so stubborn."

Of course, Bag Ears was toting a

brutal load. Three big blankets, a good seventy-five pounds of tinned footstuff and staples, a big iron skillet to do double duty as a prospector's gold-pan between mealtimes. Then there were the pick and the shovel and—yes, he thought, smiling, Bag Ears had a right to be jealous of Dolly, who carried only a one-hundred-twenty pounds of skin-and-bones, tubercular man to earn her oats.

He laughed. "That's this world for you, Bag Ears. No justice."

He wiped perspiration off his wide forehead with a bony white hand, and his blue eyes darkened. No justice from his own standpoint, either, if being cursed with a consumptive's ailing lungs was to be classified as an injustice of Nature. When one's heart lives in Boston, it is hard to be forced toward the dryer, higher, healthier climate of the far west.

Sometimes a man tries to solve such personal problems by simply forgetting them in a whisky stupor. But that's no solution, and now he realized it. Five days out, and never a drop, he thought, smiling grimly. And if he found no gold out here in these mountains, he was well on the way to finding something of much greater value—a new lease of health, and of self-respect.

He smiled back toward the burro, which was clopping patiently along the rubbly trail under its mountainous burden.

"Guess I could learn a few things from you, Bag Ears," he said softly.

"I notice you don't do much griping. Me, thinking *I've* got troubles."

"You really said something that time, Doc," a raspy voice snarled from behind a manzanita clump, up ahead of him. He heard a throaty chuckle, and strained to make out the features of the fellow, at the same time trying to keep Dolly from bucking. He was almost as shaken with surprise, in this moment, as the poor mare was. The raspy voice went on thickly, "You got troubles, all right, Doc," and the fellow stepped out from behind the bush, pointing a Colt's sixshooter squarely at Doc's midsection.

Doc stared speechlessly at him. For a brittle second, he had the sensation of thunder crashing within his emaciated, consumptive chest. "Jack Stapp..." he mumbled.

The outlaw's black eyes glittered in the thin cruel face. He spat into the trail without moving the threatening gun, his eyes never leaving Doc's face.

"Giddown off the mare, Doc. I dunno how come my luck's improved, all of a sudden, but I been sure'n'hell waitin' fer a chance at you."

Doc felt perspiration pop on his bony wrists. His heart was thumping so fast he feared a spell of faintness might overtake him. He said, with as level a voice as he could manage, "What's your grudge, Jack? Only time you and I ever crossed trails before, you were in trouble, and I fixed up your hand."

"You fixed me up, all right," snarled the outlaw. There was a hysterical gleam in his bitter eyes, and the hand that held the sixgun was trembling in the heat of his emotion. "You fixed me good, Doc. Blabbin' it all over the county about takin' off them two fingers. I been keepin' my eyes open, Doc. I seen them reward dodgers." He spat through his teeth. "'Three-finger Jack!' One thousand dollars.. Giddown off the mare, doc. Wouldn' wanna bloody that nice Texas saddle."

DOC DIDN'T move. He was afraid to. Never much of a fighting man, he didn't even play with the thought of trying to jump Jack Stapp's gun. He had imagination, and native intelligence enough to picture the consequences of such a foolhardy action. "I didn't blab, Jack," he said bleakly. "You're a smart man...think it through. There were witnesses, plenty of them, when you got your

hand shot up in Shoshone. And you were seen again, leaving my office in the Junction. Seen favoring your right hand—which naturally draws attention—and with two fingers missing... I never blabbed, Jack."

"You talk purty good, Doc. You talk like a first-class, coyote liar... Now git down off the mare."

Doc smiled a thin, bitter smile, as he grabbed the saddle horn and let himself creakily down onto the rubble-strewn trail.

Jack Stapp jabbed the Colt viciously at him and snarled, "Wipe that grin off yer face, Doc." His black eyes slitted. "What's so damn' funny about takin' a .45 slug in yer belly?"

Doc tried not to look at the gun, and said, gulping, "Good Lord, Stapp, if you're going to kill me, get to it. Don't play the cat-and-mouse..." He shrugged limply. "I was smiling at the irony of this, if you must know. Here I'd sworn off the liquor, and come out on this prospecting jaunt, hoping to regain my health, and turn over a new page in life, so to speak, and—" Again the bitter little smile bent his thin lips at the edges. "Well, you see what's come of my good intentions."

"If you're playin' fer sympathy, Doc," snarled the outlaw, "you—"

Doc could feel his palms turning moist with sweat, his thin fingers trembling. It was one thing to face Death; it was a worse thing not being able to fore-gauge the moment of final disaster. He toyed frantically with the thought of rushing at Stapp, forcing his hand. But he could not move his trembling legs. He stood paralyzed with his fear, a small, abject figure hopelessly awaiting destruction.

"Do it, man!" he suddenly screamed at the outlaw. "Go on, pull that trigger. If there's an iota of mercy in your makeup—"

Stapp's finger was tightening against the trigger. And his vicious mouth was curled in a predatory sneer. "Cut that damn' yammering, Doc," he suggested. "Mebbe I ain't in sech an all-fired hurry as you are. Mebbe I got to stand here a while, an' work myself up to it, slow-like, by remindin' myself how I been cooped up like a rat fer three months, with nothin' decent to put in my belly, an' nobuddy t' talk to but a dumb hoss, an' no chance of gittin' out of the county alive, was I to show my crippled hand down the Valley. All 'count of you, Doc, an your blabbin' tongue..."

"Will you shoot?" cried out Doc. "Will you..."

"No," Stapp said softly, and chuckled in his throat. "I got a better idee, Doc."

Doc stared upward numbly.

"A better idee," slurred Three-finger Jack Stapp, and showed brown-stained gap teeth, "which you give me your ownself. That cat-and-mouse idee kind of appeals t' me, Doc. You're gunna suffer a while, like I been doin'. I'm gunna make you wait fer it."

A horrified expression crossed Doc's bony face as he stared at the hulking devil. "You...you..."

"You can be my guest a while, Doc. I been needin' somebuddy to fetch firewood fer me, an' do my cookin', an'—most of all—somebuddy t' talk to. That's you, Doc." Stapp grinned. "Sure, I'll tie you up every night, an' watch you close daytimes. An' if you was to try pullin' a run-out..."

"I will," Doc said slowly. "I'll—"

"You don't git far," laughed the outlaw, "after I've took an' burnt that Texas saddle to hell-an'-gone in the fire. You couldn't even git near that frisky red roan of mine, Doc. I figger to hide my own saddle. An' you don't look t' me like a man that'd do so good, ridin' bareback."

"You devil," gritted Doc. "You ruthless, stone-hearted—"

"Grab aholt of them reins," snapped the outlaw, "an' start walkin'."

Doc didn't move.

Stapp snapped the gun aloft, like a bludgeon, and stepped in toward him. "You hear what I said, Doc?" he hissed. "Grab that mare an' git movin'.

Mebbe I ain't ready to gutshoot you yet, but I'd sure admire to raise some bumps on yuh, jest keepin' my hand in."

Doc reached for the mare's bridle and walked downtrail, while Stapp trudged behind, throatily chuckling.

THREE NIGHTS later, Stapp scowled at Doc across a flickering fire, and growled pointedly, "Fer a blabbermouth that hadda beat his chops an' git me in trouble, you ain't talkin' much, Doc. I tol' you I wanted somebuddy t' talk to." The outlaw spat into the flame, and steam hissed like a rattler among the red coals. "Mebbe," Stapp suggested, "you're gittin' tired of livin'."

Doc stared at the flames and said nothing.

"What're you thinkin' of, Doc?" growled the ill-natured outlaw.

"Of a man," Doc said bleakly.

"What man?"

"Socrates."

"Socrates!" growled Stapp. "Who in—"

"He was a philosopher," Doc explained bitterly. "He died more than two thousand years ago, Stapp."

"Then why think about him?" Stapp laughed shortly and spat again. "Me, I don't give a hoot in hell fer any man that's bin dead two minutes. Dead men ain't gunna make no trouble fer me. That's the trouble with you eddicated jaybirds, Doc. Always thinkin' about somethin' that don't stack up worth a—"

"The reason I was thinking about Socrates," Doc explained patiently, "was that there's such a close parallel between his life and my own."

"Yeah?" Stapp sneered. "You ain't no philosopher, Doc. You're a dead pigeon."

"Socrates," Doc mused on, "was thrown into prison for talking too much. I'm in a prison of sorts here myself, because you think I told—"

"I don't think, Doc; I know," growled the outlaw.

Doc smiled bitterly into the flames. "Socrates was a martyr, too, Stapp. People weren't ready for what he had to tell them, and—"

"Cut out all that hifalutin' talk, Doc. I ain't int'rested in them old time jaspers."

"Maybe you should be," Doc said under his breath, as the finer points of a plan suddenly came to him. Stapp might take a much keener interest in the ancient Greek thinker, Doc thought grimly, if he knew what the future held in store for him.

Doc put the first part of his plan into action the following morning, when Stapp left the camp on a short hunting expedition, seeking fresh meat for the larder. Doc took Stapp's heavy war blankets up stream and rubbed them vigorously against the leaves of a wizened poison oak bush he had previously spotted. He took great care not to contact the poison leaves with his own skin, and he was careful, also, to replace the blankets exactly as he had found them.

The next morning, the unsuspecting outlaw rolled out cursing a blue streak, scratching doglike at the small white welts which covered the back of his hands, his neck, and his face.

"Come here, Doc," he rumbled disgustedly. "Mebbe it's lucky I ain't done you in yet. What in tarnation is good fer this kind of a skin rash?"

Doc took one look at the welts and suddenly cringed from closer contact with the outlaw. "Lord, man, that's not just a rash. You're mighty bad off, in case you don't know it."

Stapp's Adam's apple jutted as he swallowed thickly. "Talk straight, Doc. What is it? Looks like plain poison—"

"It's eczema."

"Eczema?" gulped the outlaw.

"Kind of a skin rot, Stapp. Comes from bad blood, which in turn comes from bad diet."

"Yeah," breathed Stapp. "I been eatin' whatever— Dammit, Doc, do somethin'. What's the best treatment?"

Doc pretended to think it over. "Have to get some of that bad blood

out of you, first off." He smiled crookedly at Stapp. "That is, if you trust a man in my shoes to—"

"I don't trust nobuddy," growled Stapp. "I been bled before. I'll know if you make a false move and—" he patted one of his holstered sixguns "—I'll have old John Iron here stuck in your belly... Aw right, don't stand there. Git busy."

Doc shrugged. He built up the cook-fire, and boiled some water in a tiny Dutch Oven. He took Stapp's long-bladed, all-purpose jackknife, and sterilized the sharpened point of it. While the outlaw suspiciously pointed a cocked gun straight at his stomach, Doc made an incision in the man's free wrist, severing a small artery from which blood spurted slowly in time with Stapp's heartbeats.

"Dammit," Stapp smouldered, "that hurts, Doc."

"What would you rather have," Doc asked slyly, "a lifetime of itching and scratching, or a little pain? We can nip this thing in the bud... Hold still, man. And keep that dirty sleeve away from it." He turned away from the outlaw and marched upstream toward a tiny plant he had spotted, with thin, finely-veined leaves and small white flowers.

"What're you up to?" snapped the harried outlaw.

Doc was breaking off a handful of the small leaves and flowers. He dropped them into the boiling water above his fire. "Got to put something on that cut to prevent infection," he said with professional sternness. "There's enough germs on that dirty wrist to infect an army, Stapp... Hold still, now."

He dipped one long shirt-tail into the boiling brew, and used it for a pad with which to dab the mixture upon Stapp's bleeding wrist. "How's that?"

"Stings like blazes," the outlaw said gruffly.

"Bound to," Doc said idly. "That's how you know it's a good germ killer. Hold still now. Let it be."

STAPP WAS shaking the arm experimentally. His black eyes stared at Doc blankly. "What was that stuff you put on there, Doc? Don't act jest like a germ killer, if you ask me. Pain's creepin' right up my arm. By damn, that's too much t' bear. I..." His hawk face twisted. He set the gun down in his lap and instinctively rubbed at the arm where the pain had located.

Doc snapped a hand down toward the gun in the outlaw's lap. But he had not reckoned with Stapp's lightning reflexes. The outlaw's hand stabbed at the gun just a half-second after Doc's did, and they grabbed the heavy sixgun together.

Doc had hold of the weapon by the smooth ivory handle. He tugged mightily against the back-pressure of the outlaw's arm. Stapp was gripping the gun by the barrel. He suddenly realized the gun was cocked, and was pointing at him. He thrust the barrel upward, half-breaking Doc's flimsy grip, and raged, "By damn, Doc, I'll kill yuh. This time—"

The gun went off with a dizzying crash. The slug whined harmlessly against the rocky wall of the gorge, but the flame seared Stapp's shoulder. He wrenched mightily on the gun, succeeded in breaking Doc's grip, but failed to maintain his startled grasp of the hot barrel. The gun flew back over his head and plopped into the gurgling water.

Stapp swore wrathfully and stabbed at his other gun with the arm that was paining. Somehow, that arm seemed to have lost its usefulness, momentarily. Stapp missed on his first stab at the gun. Doc butted the man hard in the stomach, and rolled him over.

Stapp was clawing at the gun still, and Doc leaped on him bodily, like a small terrier boldly attacking a mountain bear or a clawing bobcat.

The gun came out of Stapp's holster just as Doc's flying figure crashed against him. Stapp lost his grip on the heavy sixshooter. "Yuh crazy little coyote!" he gritted. "What

makes yuh think yuh kin rough-an'-tumble with me? I'm gunna snap them arms like kindlin' wood, Doc. I'm gunno choke yuh t' death, gradual."

Doc punched at the outlaw's middle. He threshed and squirmed in the bigger man's encircling arms. It was futile. Slowly, the outlaw exerted more pressure. Doc felt the breath being forced from his flimsy lungs. Stapp was bending his own big body forward, arching Doc's slender back more and more with each added pressure.

"I gotta better idee, Doc. I'm gunna break yer back fer yuh."

Doc could believe it. He felt the pressure increase, felt his head swim dizzily as the arch in his frail back approached its natural limit. Lancing pains shot up along his vertebrae, between his thin shoulders. He felt the dark cloud of unconsciousness coming upon him, then—a miracle—the pressure relaxed.

Doc got one thin elbow between himself and the outlaw, and thrust it out sharply. Stapp released his grip and staggered back toward the stream bank, fanning his forehead with the back of one weakened wrist. "Blame it, I'm sick. I'm..." He suddenly crumpled at the knees and pitched to the ground. His hawklike black eyes stared up at Doc numbly. "Yuh sneakin' little coyote, yuh've pulled a whizzer off on me."

Doc picked up Stapp's fallen six-gun and pointed it idly toward the outlaw. "You're a dead man, Stapp," he said softly. "You realize that, don't you?"

"Now wait up, Doc. Don't pull that trigg—"

"Don't have to. Remember what you were saying about my friend Socrates, Stapp? That no man who'd been dead two thousand years could make trouble for you. I'm afraid you were wrong. If it wasn't for Socrates—"

"What're you talkin' about?" the outlaw fumed weakly.

"That wasn't eczema you had, Stapp. I rubbed poison oak in your blankets. So you didn't really need bleeding."

"You sneaky little—"

"That germ killer," went on Doc blithely, "that I brewed over the fire, is slowly killing you, Stapp. I'd noticed that bush a few days ago, but I never gave much thought to it till we had our little talk about Socrates." Doc smiled thinly. "I'm going to haul a dead man out of here today, Stapp, and collect me a thousand-dollar bounty."

The outlaw tried to speak, but was too far gone now to do more than growl weakly. His black eyes glared balefully upward.

"Socrates was a suicide," Doc went on softly. "When he wanted to die; he drank hemlock. That bush upstream was a water hemlock, Stapp, for your information. Sometimes it pays a man to be educated."

But Stapp's eyes were closed now, and he was barely breathing. Doc thought of the thousand dollars that would be coming to him, for bringing Stapp in. He shrugged philosophically, as friend Socrates might have shrugged over two thousand years ago, in old Athens.

For a man who had not yet laid a pick to the ground, he'd turned a pretty smart trick of prospecting.

★

Another Fine Novelet by Carroll John Daly

GAS *featuring Race Williams*

appears in the current issue of

SMASHING DETECTIVE STORIES

BOOTHILL DOUBLE-CROSS

It was a cut-and-dried case of bank-robbery—that is, until Sheriff Dan Thomas decided to snoop around.

by Crag Martin

IT WAS FRIDAY evening, and another five minutes would have found the young sheriff well on the way to his big T-Box spread, where he spent his week-ends whenever possible.

He closed the door of his office, a big man deliberate of movement, and it was then that the hornet-buzz of angry voices reached him as a swelling hum. He turned without haste, and his steady gray eyes studied the sullen crowd marching purposefully in his direction, occupying the full width of the dusty street.

The sheriff's thin lips were compressed into a fine line to mark the only change of expression on his craggy face as he recognized the vanguard of trouble. He waited patiently, his shrewd, placid eyes settling upon Mark Wilson, the banker, at the head of the mob. "I'm here to demand that you place Fred Benson under arrest, Sheriff Thomas," the dapper, middle-aged banker clipped off the words a minute later. "He's guilty of bank robbery, and it was luck and nothing else that enabled me to find out about it before he got too much of a start. As it is, I believe you can overtake and apprehend him, if you start at once."

The sheriff remained unperturbed as he raised a big hand to silence the crowd; a chill moved silently into his

gray eyes when he returned his attention to Mark Wilson.

"Now start at the beginning," the sheriff said in measured tones. "You said something about the bank being robbed."

"Looted," Wilson snapped. "By Fred Benson. It wasn't difficult to imagine what happened, and it looks to me like he had it calculated that he'd have a two day start, tomorrow being Saturday and the next day Sunday. By then he could have been out of the county and beyond your jurisdiction, and in a few more days he'd be across the border and reasonably safe from prosecution. It was mere luck that sent me back to the bank today; usually I don't return after four, and Benson took that into consideration. I did go back today, to place something in the safe for Hod Carter, though, and that's when I found out." He paused for effect, and then blurted angrily, "There's almost twenty thousand dollars missing—and Benson. Enough to ruin half the people in this county, if he gets away with it."

Mark Wilson, president of the Longhorn County Bank, was a small man, with snapping black eyes and sharp, pinched features, and hair that was prematurely white. He was the most respected citizen in the small town, and his advice was sought and adhered to. People listened when he spoke, and they accepted without question the things he said now, and the rumble that arose from their ranks told of their seething resentment.

"Never did trust that gent," someone snarled. "Too quiet, and kept to himself all the time, like the rest of us wasn't as good as he was."

"He'd speak, but that's about all," came from another. "He never did belong in this country of horses and cattle and hard-working men."

"He was just waiting for a chance like this," someone else said. "He got it, and took it, and ran like the jack-rabbit he is. Everybody knew he never had an ounce of guts."

A chorus of assent greeted this, and the sheriff realized the vastness of his problem, then.

HE HAD KNOWN for a long time that Fred Benson was not popular with the townspeople, and he knew this was a fact that bothered Benson greatly. Benson loved Longhorn County, and its people, and he wanted to be part of it and to serve it in the only work he really loved: banking. But somehow he never could make friends, although he had been born and raised right in the town.

Benson was as young as the sheriff's twenty-five years, and he was quiet and mild and introspective by nature. He wasn't a mixer, and he brooded about this, which made it worse. But he wasn't a coward, as so many believed, and for proof of this the sheriff had only to remember the time six years ago when Benson had risked his own life to venture out on the desert in a successful search for the sheriff, who had been lost and would have died from thirst but for Benson.

Sheriff Thomas was not forgetting the oath he had taken, but he was not forgetting that Fred Benson was his best friend, either. "I'm saying you gents are barking up the wrong tree," he said quietly. "If that bank was robbed, it wasn't Fred Benson that did it. You'll recall we've had our share of rustling and robbing before this, and I'm of the mind that the gent who did the other, did this."

He was thinking of Hod Carter as he spoke, and his searching eyes narrowed when he found the sneering man at the far fringe of the crowd.

Carter was six feet tall and weighed two hundred pounds, matching the sheriff inch for inch and pound for pound. A slight paunch and thinning hair told that he had passed his prime, but he was still a powerful man. His face was wind-burned and seamed, and cruelty lurked but half-hidden in the depths of his greenish eyes. His nose was large and bulbous, and his

thick lips were parted in a perpetual sneer. He never worked, and yet he always had money, and while the sheriff had viewed him with suspicion for the past year his most careful scrutiny turned up no shred of evidence to connect him with the crime that rolled unchecked through the county.

Hod Carter met the sheriff's gaze with aggravating insolence, and then he prodded at the crowd's anger. "Every second we stand here jawing makes it that much better for Benson," he said in a naturally harsh voice. "Are we going to have to do your job for you, Sheriff?"

"If I ever need help, I'll choose my men," Sheriff Thomas flared in rare, controlled anger. He raked Carter with angry eyes, and although Carter flushed wrathfully, he dropped his stare. The sheriff continued in a milder tone then. "I'll go talk to Fred Benson, and see what he has to say about all this."

"You'll put him in jail, Sheriff," Mark Wilson stated sternly. "And he'll stand trial for bank robbery. If he's innocent he'll have every chance to prove it, but we want him where we can watch him, meanwhile."

●

The sheriff turned away without another word, ignoring the renewed rumble that again came from the crowd. He pulled his barrel-chested bay away from the tie-rail and mounted, and fifteen minutes later he was bearing down on the lonely little cabin Benson had built for himself far enough beyond the town's limits to insure him the privacy that characterized him.

The sheriff frowned when he spotted a figure saddling a horse behind the cabin. He urged his horse forward so sharply and surprised gelding bounded ahead, and a half-minute later the sheriff reined in beside Benson—and he found himself looking into the muzzle of Fred Benson's gun!

Benson was of medium heighth, but he appeared taller because of his thinness. Due to the nature of his work he seemed pallid beside other men, and his hands, like his entire mien, were soft.

"The chances are you wouldn't be here, if you hadn't already heard," Benson said mildly in a voice tinged with regret.

The sheriff nodded, his big hands folded on the pommel, his face expressionless. "They're saying in town you robbed the bank," he said calmly. "Looks like you were planning to clear out, Fred."

"What else can I do, Dan?" Benson demanded, not lowering the gun. "I learned about the robbery this afternoon, and I saw right away the position I was in. I saw where it put you, too, and it looked like the best thing I could do was to get out of the county. I didn't take that money, and that's the truth, but I'd never be able to prove it, and both of us can see that. If you believe me you'll forget you saw me, and let me ride on out for another chance."

Sheriff Thomas shook his head regretfully. "No," he said quietly. "In town they're also saying you're a coward, and I know that's not so. You've got to go back with me, Fred. We've got to prove it, and we've got to put the real thief where he belongs. You're the best friend I've ever had, and I owe my life to you, too, but I think you know I'd take you in no matter what it cost me."

"Am I under arrest?"

The sheriff bobbed his head decisively. "It can't be any other way right now, with Mark Wilson signing the warrant, but it's best. I aim to clear your name, and a day or so in jail is better than a lifetime on the dodge. Now, come on; you couldn't use that gun on me, and you know it."

Benson remained motionless for a second. A spasm of desperation changed to doubt almost instantly, and then despair settled heavily in his mind, his shoulders slumped, and then he sighed as he tossed his weap-

on into the cabin and silently mounted his horse.

SHERIFF Dan Thomas did not refer again to the robbery until the following morning.

He ordered meals from a corner restaurant for himself and his prisoner, and he was rolling his after-breakfast smoke when Benson finally placed his tin plate, and looked up. "You're no more guilty of that robbery than I am," Sheriff Thomas murmured to Benson. "But you're in a bad spot, sure enough."

Benson didn't answer, and the sheriff went on. "I've been up to the bank, and had a look around. It had to be an inside job, all right. Done by someone who knew his way around the bank, and who didn't have to use force."

Benson nodded. "I knew that yesterday when I returned from dinner. I discovered the theft, and any button could see that I was sure to be pegged for the thief."

The sheriff was pensive, but at last he spoke. "It was an inside job, and if you didn't do it, it leaves only—Mark Wilson."

Benson gave no indication of surprise. A sardonic grin lifted the corners of his mouth when he said, "You said what I've been thinking all along, and lacked the nerve to say. Even so, you'll never be able to do anything about it. And I'd bet all I have a mob will pull me out of this jail tonight and lynch me, because that money is still missing."

"Hod Carter is the one I've had my eye on," the sheriff growled. "I was so sure he was behind the rustling that's driving the ranchers crazy that I guess I forgot it could have been somebody else, and it looks like I made a big mistake. Now, I'm wondering if maybe Hod and Wilson weren't in cahoots on this thing. But whether they were or not, Wilson is our man on this job, because Carter just wouldn't have had the opportunity; no one would have had, but you or Wilson."

Benson grunted. "You know it, and I know it," he said. "Fat lot of good it's going to do us. Wilson will just lay low until I'm convicted. He can afford to wait, and he's smart enough to do just that."

Someone cleared his throat in the doorway then, and the sheriff turned to face Chuck Meadows, an unkempt mossy-horn who did odd jobs around town.

The sheriff's eyes brightened suddenly as a plan took tentative shape in his mind. The bow-legged ancient hobbled into the jail, and the sheriff grinned and spoke as if he had read the old man's mind.

"Not just yet, Chuck," he said to the man who frequently tended to the needs of the prisoners when the sheriff was busy elsewhere. "I'll get in touch with you if I need you."

"Need me!" Meadows yelped, sounding injured. "Why, this younker's guilty as Satan, and his trial is a smart spell off. You can't be here twenty-four hours a day, Dan."

The sheriff continued to grin. "There won't be a trial, more than likely, Chuck. Not for Benson, anyway. He's innocent, and I'll have my proof of it by Monday night."

Meadows nodded doubtfully at that and immediately began a slow retreat to the door, and the sheriff knew the mossy-horn could hardly wait to begin spreading the news.

"Oh," Meadows said gruffly. "Well, that's sure a different thing, Sheriff. I didn't have any idee—"

He left the jail as quickly as his warped legs would permit, and his bootheels beat a fading tatoo on the boardwalk.

"What made you say a thing like that?" Benson asked gruffly when silence had again settled in the jail. "You won't have proof in a month of Sundays, but your bluff might make somebody more anxious to see me lynched just to take the spotlight off of the whole thing."

"I know Meadows. The story will be all over town in an hour," the sheriff said. "I did it because we both agree Wilson is smart enough to lay low, unless he's scared. And he'll be plenty scared if he and Hod Carter are partners, because Hod isn't smart, and Wilson knows it. He'll investigate to be sure Carter didn't upset the apple-cart. Besides that, Wilson's got the money, more than likely, and he'll be a mite worried we might come across that evidence someway. Anyway, waiting won't get us a thing, and this is the only plan I can think of. Now we'll just have to wait and see what happens when Meadows' story gets around."

ACTION came so quickly that even the sheriff was surprised; he had thought that it would take at least twenty-four hours before the fidgety little banker's nerves were tortured to the point where inactivity would be impossible for him.

It was late afternoon, and the sheriff was taking what precautions he could to insure his prisoner against mob-justice, and he had already accepted Benson's idea that such a try would be made. And he knew he would protect Benson with his own life.

He was barricading a window with heavy planks when something solid and heavy thumped against the closed door.

Frowning, he laid down his hammer, and went to investigate. He found a paper-covered rock lying in the center of the boardwalk, but whoever had thrown it had found sanctuary behind the many buildings lining both sides of the street.

Back in his office he smoothed the crumpled paper on his desk, and read the crudely printed message:

Hod Carter was in with Fred Benson on the bank robbery. Benson gave the money to Carter, so Benson couldn't be caught with it on him, knowing he'd be suspected first off. They was to split it later. Now, Carter means to pull out with the loot alone, but you can find him with all the evidence you need tonight at the old mine camp west of town. A friend.

The sheriff reread the message, pacing the floor silently, and then he went to Benson's cell and shoved the note between the bars. "Looks like we've got somebody riled up," he said dryly.

Benson wet his lips nervously as he handed the note back to the sheriff after reading it. "If your original idea was right, Mark Wilson wrote that note," he said.

The sheriff nodded. "My idea, too."

"This is a trick," Benson muttered. "Wilson is scared, all right. Like you said, he can't quite trust Carter. My guess is he plans to have Carter wait for you out there and gun you down as soon as you show up."

The sheriff shook his head. "Nope. That isn't it," he said. "There's too much chance I wouldn't go alone; Wilson doesn't know but what I might get up a posse and surround the place and force Carter's surrender. And he wouldn't take the chance he took when he looted the bank, and then let the money slip through his fingers as it would if I did it that way. And yet, I have a feeling that money will be there, just to tie Carter with the job like the note says. Only Wilson will still be in the clear. So it looks like I've got to play along with the idea and keep that date, feller, if we're ever going to clear your name."

"Dan," Fred said fervently, his own predicament forgotten now. "You know it's a trick. As far as I'm concerned I'd just as soon you forgot the whole thing, or else take that posse along."

And again the sheriff shook his head. "Maybe the posse is just what the note-writer wants us to do," he mused. "To kill Hod for him, and then maybe we'd find that the money

wasn't there after all. Wilson wouldn't have a worry then, and he'd have all the money besides. We'd be worse off than before."

"Somebody wants me to go to that camp," the sheriff analyzed then. "Maybe it's to get Hod out of the way, and maybe it's a trap to stop me before I learn something really important. And maybe it's both."

His eyes narrowed speculatively as he continued. "I've been trying to picture that shack out there; I might be loco as blazes, but hanged if I don't think it's both. Look. Just supposing this gent gets me out there with this note, and then gets Hod out here, which wouldn't be any trick at all. Then, when I find the planted evidence, Hod sees the spot he's in. His only chance to escape prosecution is to shut me up for good, and this note-writer can't lose if he tries it. He plugs the survivor, me or Carter, from his hiding place. Then he rides in, picks up the loot and rides out again, and it'll look like Hod and I killed each other when I went after Hod for something nobody will ever figure out."

"This note would tell why you went there, if you leave it with me," Fred said tensely. "But don't take the chance. Take that posse and surround the shack."

"I can't, for the reasons I've mentioned," the sheriff said slowly. "I've got to play it the way this gent wants it, and add a few ideas of my own."

Benson waited, and then the sheriff explained. "There's a lot of agarita out there at the camp five miles outside of town. You know where it is as well as I do. That shack has only one window, you'll remember, and if Wilson is going to be waiting to drygulch somebody, he'll put himself where he can cover the door, which gives us some idea of where he'll be hiding. I want you to get out there first, and find a spot in that brush where you can cover both the figuring on cutting into the play inside. You've got to get there first, too, so this gent doesn't see you ride up."

Benson's chin dropped to his chest in surprise, but the sheriff went on as if he hadn't noticed. "Somebody's going to be keeping a sharp eye on me until close to dark," he said, unlocking Benson's cell-door but leaving it closed. "Likewise, I'll be watching Wilson, which ought to give you a pretty good chance to sneak out of town. You ought to be set by the time I ride out to meet Hod, and Wilson goes to carry out his scheme. You just see that Wilson doesn't buy chips in the game; I'll handle Carter myself."

"I'm beginning to see what kind of a friend you are," Benson said huskily. "I'll try to see that you won't be sorry you trusted me, sheriff."

FULL DARK had come and the minute hand had moved fifteen minutes past nine o'clock when the sheriff completed his stealthy approach that brought him unobserved to the doorway of the little shack. Pausing just outside, ears straining for tell-tale sounds that would indicate he had been discovered, and crouching so as to provide but scant target in case Wilson was out there waiting in the dark, he drew his six-shooter.

Then he catapaulted through the opening and got the wall to his back, and Hod Carter, sitting on the bunk at the opposite side, was covered before he realized what had happened.

Beside Carter lay his own gun, as if he were expecting company whom he did not actually trust, but the position in which he allowed himself to be caught told plainly that he had expected the visitor to come riding up boldly.

"Shove that gun onto the floor, slow-like," the sheriff murmured in a voice that was ominous by its very mildness. "Maybe that note telling me I'd find a bank robber here was right after all."

"What are you talking about?" Carter snarled, his eyes snapping with hate. "You've got your bank robber in jail right now."

But he did as the sheriff ordered, and the gun thumped to the floor.

It was time for the bait, the sheriff decided, and he pulled out the note he had received earlier in the day, and tossed it to Carter. "Read that," he snapped. "Someone wanted me to find you here, and there's the proof. If that loot is here, I'm going to figure I've got a pretty good chance to clear Benson's name, because only your partner could have written that note, and Benson was in jail at the time."

Carter read the note, silently, his face flushing, and then he searched the all but barren shack with his eyes. He threw himself to his knees a second later and reached beneath the bunk, and slowly he pulled forth the money stolen from the bank, branded by the sack in which it was found.

"Somebody double-crossed you," the sheriff murmured with satisfaction and aware of Carter's surprise. "You couldn't have pulled that job alone, Hod, and common sense tells you the only man who could have got me out here is your partner. You want to talk about it?"

Carter's eyes were bright with the lust for vengeance, but he rejected the law as an ally. "I don't know how the money got here," he snarled.

"Hod," the sheriff told the grim-faced outlaw, "maybe you were lucky. My guess is that you carried out somebody's orders to do the rustling that has been going on in Longhorn County, and that somebody figures to be Wilson. It was only a question of time before I nailed you, but would we ever have proved it on Wilson? Now's your chance. Wilson made a mistake when he wasn't satisfied with the money to be made from rustling, and he turned to bank robbing and then double-crossed his own partner. Tell what you know, and there's a chance you'll be able to even the score later."

"You're still guessing, law-dog," the big outlaw said harshly. "And it could be that you walked right into a trap that's just about to close on you."

Victory made Carter's eyes suddenly bright, and when they went to the doorway and held, the sheriff felt an uncontrollable chill crawl up his spine to the short hair at the base of his neck.

"Drop it, Sheriff," a tight voice to the right of him snapped. "You couldn't turn fast enough, so don't try it."

The sheriff realized the truth of Wilson's statement, and reluctantly he dropped his gun to the floor.

Carter let his breath from his body in a minor explosion, and he took a long step in the direction of his gun still lying by his bunk. "I never was so glad to see a man in my life," Carter grinned. "For a moment I almost fell for that double-cross talk. I reckon the sheriff was getting too close for comfort, huh? And you tricked him into coming out here where we could close his mouth."

"Stand still, Hod," Wilson barked, his snapping black eyes reflecting his extreme nervousness. "I'm still calling the turn."

"As you intimated," Wilson said in a softer voice when Carter complied, angry and puzzled, "the sheriff wasn't convinced of Benson's guilt, and he made a rash statement this morning when he said he'd have the real thief behind bars by Monday night. I thought he was guessing, but I couldn't take any chances. We did it, Hod, but Dan Thomas won't tell anybody."

"Let me fill my hand with a six-shooter," Hod said harshly. "I'll make sure he doesn't, and that's a promise."

"I told you to stand still," Wilson barked, his voice breaking as tension built a knot in his stomach.

THEN, AS Carter checked the sudden rush for his gun, he continued, speaking almost too quickly. "Getting the sheriff out here was the hardest part, and I thought he was too smart to walk into a trap like this. But he did. There's only two men who can prove Benson didn't rob that bank. You're the other one, Hod."

Hod took a long minute to digest this statement, and when he had done so there was understanding, but absolutely no fear in his eyes. "I've sided you on every shady deal you've ever pulled," he whispered. "I took all the chances, and for a pay-off you're slitting my throat. They don't come much lower than that, Wilson."

Wilson managed a strained grin. "The whole plan is working," he said. "Twenty thousand dollars, plus the rustling money, will take one man a long ways. I was meant to be more than a banker, Hod. Now it looks like I will be."

The sheriff hadn't said a word, and in his heart he didn't hold it against Benson for falling down on his end of the job. Something had gone wrong, that was all.

Then Benson's voice sounded in the doorway, bird-call soft, but in the tense atmosphere it was like the retort of a forty-five.

Accepting the newest development immediately, the sheriff tried to watch both men at once. He was conscious of the anticipatory gleam that came to Carter's eyes, and he saw the terror that made Wilson's face chalky. Wilson continued to hold his gun despite Benson's orders to drop it; Wilson constituted the greatest threat, the sheriff realized, because he might, in sudden panic, squeeze off the shot that notched him before Benson could prevent it.

"I thought you'd never get here," the sheriff grinned at Benson, hiding the nervousness he felt. "Things looked pretty desperate for a little bit there."

"I'm going to count to one," Benson purred to Wilson to help him make up his mind. "If you haven't dropped that gun by then—"

Wilson licked lips that had suddenly become dry, and he let the gun fall from a trembling hand.

"Sorry I caused you worry, Dan," Benson said then. "But I thought I could handle the play, and I wanted Wilson to come forward to convict himself. I reckon the rest is up to you."

Benson was standing beside the sheriff now. Dan bent to retrieve his gun, and in that instant Carter hurled the sack of tobacco he had slipped out of his pocket. It knocked the candle to the floor and plunged the little shack into complete darkness, and the sheriff cursed his lack of vigilance. He triggered a shot at Carter's hurtling form, and knew he had missed.

The sheriff pulled Benson to a spot three feet from where they had stood, before Carter returned his fire. The sheriff kept his hand on Benson's arm by having Benson within reach he would know anything in the shack that moved was an enemy.

Then he waited, and he was surprised when flame leaped from Car-

ter's approximate position. The shot was greeted with an answering terror-laden shriek by Mark Wilson, and the sheriff realized that Carter was concentrating first on eliminating the man guilty of the greatest sin Carter could imagine: double-cross! He knew Wilson's moments were numbered when the banker continued to betray his presence by pleading for mercy.

When Carter fired again the sheriff was ready, and with the muzzle-flash for a target he fired three rapid shots at the big outlaw. He heard the eerie *splat* of lead shattering bone, and then Carter's long, drawn-out groan echoed through the blackness. Seconds later a repeated moan was followed by the unmistakable death-rattle, followed by a moment of silence. Then Wilson called out in a high-pitched voice. "I surrender, Sheriff. Don't shoot!"

The sheriff knew Wilson was a coward at heart, and he didn't hesitate to make his presence known when he replied. "Then strike a match so we can see what's going on," he barked. "And we'll wind up the loose ends here."

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There was satisfaction in the sheriff's face, later, when Carter's body was taken back to town and Wilson was shown in his true role. All the money had been recovered.

The townspeople, well-meaning at heart, had made what amends they could by insisting Fred Benson take over the job as town banker. And it was there that the sheriff found Benson on Monday morning, grinning broadly, standing beside the door on which his name had hastily been placed in gilt, where Wilson's had been before.

"Looks like a new deal for Longhorn County," the sheriff said softly, smiling.

"It's the beginning of a new life," Fred said as softly, thanking the sheriff with his eyes. "It's exactly like—coming home, Dan!"

It seems that the boys at top have been running out of classifications for stuff that's not to be talked about. There was *Restricted*, and *Secret*, and *Top Secret* . . . and finally, a classification to end all secret classifications. A project so secret that the member couldn't even reveal it to himself. This was

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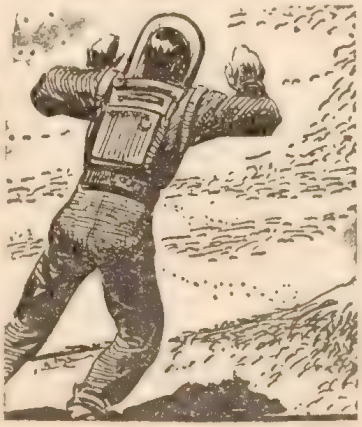

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"One thing you've got to learn, kid, if you want to ride with us, is that we don't take chances. Everything is fixed in advance . . ."

THE LIE

by Fred Landreth

THE TWO men, huddled over a small fire, tensed as a sound alien to the night reached their ever-listening ears. When the sound was repeated, each man instinctively grabbed his rifle and silently faded into the darkness.

For a time, there was no sound but the sighing of the wind in the tall pines. Then the metallic clang of a horse shoe striking a rock rang clearly through the night.

"Hey, the camp!" A clear, young voice called out. "Can I come in?"

"Who are you?" A tired voice answered from behind a rock ledge

about fifty feet from the flickering fire.

"Why, I'm Red Callahan...from Sage Flat," the rider answered.

"Come on in, but do it easy like... and keep your hands where we can see 'em," the tired voice commanded.

The person calling himself Red dismounted at the edge of the flickering light. He held his arms awkwardly away from his body as he walked stiffly to the fire. When he reached the fire, he stopped and with exaggerated slowness, he tilted his hat back on his head. The clear face of a boy in his middle teens was revealed.

"Holy smoke!" a harsh voice grunted from the other side of the fire. "It's only a button. What's the idea, riding around at night like this and scaring your betters?"

"I'm not so young!" Red answered truculently.

"Sure," the tired voice intervened smoothly. "Anybody can see that Red's man-sized." A tall, gaunt man slouched into the light. As the flickering firelight crept up the man's body and lighted his grim features, an evil looking scar athwart his sharp face stood out in bold relief.

Red straightened in astonishment, his blue eyes blank with surprise.

"Reckon you know me, son?" the man asked.

"Ye—yes—yes, sir!" Red's voice quavered with awe. "Everybody knows you. You're Butch McCready."

Butch seemed to smile as his partner stalked heavily to the fire. "Hear that, Clay?" he asked. "Everybody knows me."

"Maybe the kid knows me, too," Clay growled. "Do yuh?"

"Yes," Red answered unflinchingly. "You're Clay Burke...Butch's partner."

"How do you know these things, son?"

"I've seen both of your pictures on plenty of reward notices."

"Mmmm..." Butch drawled. "Red Callahan from Sage Flat? You must be the son of Deke and Millie Callahan. Your mother runs the boarding house and your dad...well..."

"My pap's sick," Red defended. "He only drinks to kill the misery in his back."

"Sure, we understand," Butch said. "What are you doing on this out-trail at night?"

"Going over to the Nest," Red answered hopefully. "I aim to join up with one of the gangs over there."

"You must be about eighteen," Butch ventured, adding three years to his guess. "That's when I started out."

Red smiled happily and then his face clouded as he said, "Well...I'm going on eighteen...that is...I'm going on sixteen. But I'm real good with a hand gun and I can ride anything with hair on it."

Red looked into the fire, mustering his courage, and then he looked up at Butch and blurted, "I would sure admire to ride with you, Mr. Butch?"

"Run away from home?"

"Well...sort of."

"Why do you want to ride the outtrails?" Butch asked.

"Well, gee! You're free. You don't have to ask anyone when you want to do something. Besides, you always have plenty of money...and you help the poor people."

"Figurin' on making a lot of money and helping your mother? Is that it, Red?"

"Well, maybe. But I'd rather ride with you than anyone, Mr. Butch," Red entreated. "Please...can I?"

BUTCH GAZED silently into the fire. After a moment, he looked into Red's beseeching eyes and said, "Well, I reckon we can take you on."

"But Butch," Clay interrupted. "You know..."

Butch silenced Clay with a wave of his hand. He turned to Red, "Clay's always worryin'. Just like an old settin' hen. But there's one thing you've got to remember...if you ride with me. When I give an order, you've got to do it...right then and there.

Don't matter what you think about it." Butch looked at Red searchingly as he asked, "Think you can do that?"

Red considered the question, perhaps debating the wisdom of changing task-masters. Then he answered, hesitantly, "Yes, sir. I think I can, because I don't think you'll ever tell me to do anything that ain't right."

Clay chuckled hoarsely, but at a warning glance from Butch, he changed the chuckle to a strangled cough.

"Well, I won't say that the orders I give you will always be right... but at least they'll be needful." Butch answered wryly.

"Tell me about the time you held up the bank in Jimtown," Red pleaded. "The time you and Clay fought your way through all the deputies."

"Well, Red, you see in this business...everything ain't always what it seems." Butch pulled a burning faggot from the fire and lighted an evil smelling cigar. He puffed contentedly for a moment and then said, "Lots of people got the idea that outlaws just go in with their guns blazing and pull the job. But that ain't so. Not if you want to stay in business."

Red leaned forward intently, drinking in Butch's every word. Clay looked puzzled and disgruntled.

Butch studied Red's eager face and then he continued, "It takes brains...lots of brains to make a go of this business. The first thing you've got to learn is, never take a chance; play only sure-fire bets."

Red looked doubtful, "But in that Jimtown hold-up, you took chances," he accused. "You and Clay had to fight your way through all the deputies...and the bank guard was killed by a stray bullet from one of the deputies."

"That's just what we wanted people to think," Butch answered, "but that ain't the way it happened. I had everything fixed before me and Clay went in. I had a deal with one of the deputies. For half the loot, he agreed to fix the other deputies and the sheriff. They put on a good show, but none of their shots even came close."

Butch smiled evilly and spat into the fire. He looked at Red's shocked face and continued, "But here's where the real brains come in. I made a deal with the bank guard to let us in the bank. I promised him half the loot."

"But," Red protested, "If the guard and the deputy were each going to get a half...there wouldn't have been anything left for you and Clay."

Butch laughed knowingly as he said, "That's right, son; you catch on fast. But part of the deal I had with the deputy was for him to shoot the bank guard after me and Clay got clear."

Butch was silent for a minute and then a sly grin split his face. "So Clay and I split up a little over $8000 and

the deputy got his share, but he had to pay off the rest of the deputies and the sheriff!"

Butch chuckled deep in his throat and added, "And the guard got a .44 slug in the guts for his pay."

Red looked sick and frightened. He kept his eyes on the fire, refusing to meet Butch's gaze.

Butch laughed as he said, "Don't look like that, son. You'll soon get used to the way we do things. Go get your bed roll and bed-down. We got a lot of ridin' to do, come morning."

RED GOT up slowly and walked to his horse. He fooled with the cinch for a minute and then he leaped into the saddle and spurred his startled mount down the rocky trail.

Clay leaped to his feet and threw his rifle to his shoulder. Butch leaped in and knocked the rifle upward as Clay pulled the trigger. The shot flew harmlessly into the night.

Angrily, Clay turned on Butch, "What's the idea?" he demanded. "The kid'll have a posse down on our necks as soon as he gets back to town."

"No, he won't say anything," Butch replied; "he won't ever tell anyone he saw us."

"Maybe," Clay answered grumpily, unconvinced. "Besides, why tell the kid all those lies? You know danged well we never made a deal in our lives."

Butch stretched his gaunt frame and lay back against his upturned saddle. He cradled his hands under his head and gazed into the starless sky above.

"Twenty years ago, I could have been that boy," he answered softly. He seemed lost in time remembering another night twenty years before. "Twenty years of dodging posses... twenty years of making dry-camps on out trails...because *nobody lied to me.*"

★

Here's Another of the Famous "Kewpie Donovan" Murder Mysteries

Kewpie Donovan could be very tolerant, for a price; he could put up with the vicious screwball Rittendon family, if the pay was right—and their offer was good. But having a client slain in Donovan's office was pushing matters too far!

Don't Miss This Feature Novelet

DEATH WEARS WHITE

by Wilbur S. Peacock

You'll find it in the August

FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES

LOCO LEAD

"Judge Bates" Novelet

by Lee Floren

Tobacco Jones pounced out of the doorway, and laid his gun-barrel along the man's skull.

When a wildfire sickness spreads through Cowtrail's ranches, but miraculously spared the cattle of Luke Smith...Tobacco Jones put it straight: "Set down your jug, Judge; we have some de-varmintin' to do!"

MUDDY BOOTS on his desk, Judge Lemanuel Bates slept the sleep of the just, heavy chest moving to his measured breathing. Suddenly the town of Cowtrail shook to a violent and loud explosion. The force of it was so great that the windows in the courthouse rattled despite being swollen by the week of steady rain.

Down came the judicial boots.

"What in the name of—? That sounded like black powder to me!"

Outside, men and women hollered, converging on the scene of the explosion. His Honor, one eyebrow cocked, listened. Sheriff Whiting's voice was heard; Bates also heard the voice of his partner, Tobacco Jones.

The judge lifted his boots again, leaned back and closed his eyes, assuming a posture of indifference; he knew that Tobacco Jones would soon burst into his chamber and inform him of the nature of this explosion.

His assumption was correct.

Wide of eye, his chew of tobacco frozen in his right cheek, the postmaster blurted out, "The drugstore—it got blowed up, Bates! Went sky high, it did—"

The judge feigned surprise. "The drugstore did what?"

Tobacco Jones started chewing. "Bates, you must've heard the explosion—it shook the whul town! Charlie Matthews must've been mixin' another concoction, an' he must've blowed up his joint by accident—"

Judge Bates was on his feet, pulling o his slicker. "Did Charlie get hurt?"

"Burned bad, they say. Never got to see him because Doc had already took him into the hotel— What'd you suppose happened?"

"I heard it," His Honor said, "but I figured maybe it was a miner in the nearby hills, shooting off too big a load in a test hole."

They went into the rain. Judge Bates, wearing a yellow slicker and a rain helmet, took the lead, with Tobacco Jones striding beside His Honor. Druggist Charlie Matthews was a special friend of theirs— Almost like a son to both of them, for they had reared him on their Post Hole Valley ranch. Charlie had been orphaned by death at the age of six.

He had just been out of pharmacy school for three months.

The judge cursed under his breath. Charlie always had been a great one to experiment; he had apparently experimented too far with the wrong chemicals. Bates' thought were broken as he almost ran into the girl. "Miss Mary," he said.

Tears glistened in dark eyes. "Oh, judge, it's terrible! Charlie is burned bad, so Doc Watson says—Doc has him in the hotel. I was coming for you, judge."

"There, there, Mary. Take it easy."

Rain roared down, swept by a cold spring wind. The Cowtrail volunteer fire-department was in action. Men and women stood in two lines stretching between the town pump and the burning drugstore. Filled buckets went down the line toward the fire; empty buckets were hustled back.

"We're gettin' it out, Bates," a grimy faced man grunted.

Judge Bates nodded. Apparently the fire-brigade, aided by the thick rain, had the blaze under control; not much of the frame drugstore would be burned.

"Wonder what happened?" the judge asked of the man.

"Damn fool could've blowed up the whul town," a man snarled suddenly. "Done heard you two sent the fool to drugstore-school, too, Bates."

Three points made His Honor angry. One was the name *Bates,* without the title of *Judge.* Another was the surly, taunting tone to the man's voice. And the third was the implication that because he and Tobacco Jones had sent young Charlie Matthews to pharmacy school, they were directly responsible for this explosion.

So His Honor eyed the speaker. Luke Smith was a medium-sized man, tough from the saddle, handy—so rumor claimed—with his gun. "For a man who has been on this range only about a year, Smith, you seem to have seen and heard a lot, and you apparently have formed lots of opinions. Just watch your tongue, cowman, and see it doesn't say too much."

Smith grinned crookedly. He glanced at Ed Lindbery, his top hand,

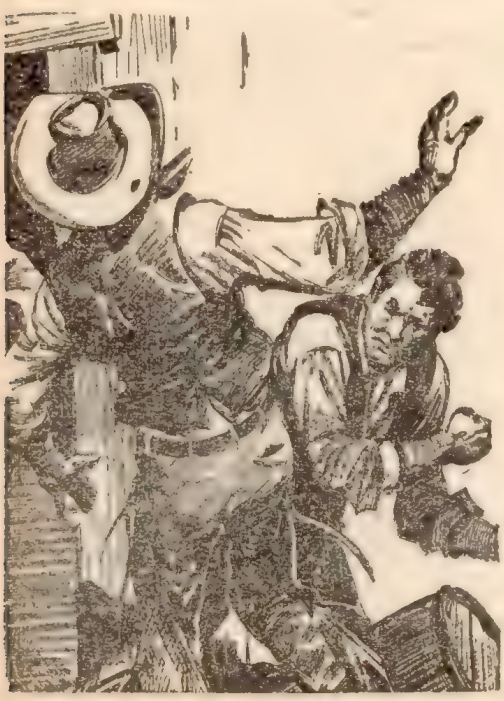
who had moved to one side, eyes on Tobacco Jones. A gaunt hand, this Lindbery, with a face as ugly as a death mask—an emotionless, sunken face with dead-pan eyes. He had a rep as a killer.

"Don't get rough with me, Bates!" Smith warned.

Judge Bates spoke evenly. "Don't try to order me around, you two-bit cowdog. I was on this grass while you were longlooping steers down in Texas. You might scare a few of these farmers, but you aren't putting the run on me, understand?"

SMITH'S grin widened cynically. Ed Lindbery studied Tobacco Jones with measured toughness. Onlookers watched and waited. Judge Bates had almost directly accused Bart Smith of being a cow-thief. True, the Texas herd Smith had trailed into this section of Wyoming had consisted of cattle with vented brands. They could have been stolen cows. "So I'm a rustler, eh, Bates?"

"Take it or leave it," His Honor said.



"He's a-lookin' fer trouble, Bates," Tobacco Jones said quietly.

Judge Bates nodded. This pair hated him and his partner; he and Tobacco Jones had grubstaked a few of the farmers who had taken up homesteads on grass claimed by Smith and Lindbery.

The Circle Diamond men also hated young Charlie Matthews. Charlie had taken some college courses in veterinary medicine. He had doctored some of the hogs and cows belonging to the poor farmers. This had rubbed Smith's fur the wrong direction.

"Forget it," Judge Bates said, and started to turn.

Smith's heavy hand shot out. Smith's fingers fastened around the sleeve of His Honor's raincoat.

The cloth ripped.

Judge Bates had left his whiskey-jug in his office. Usually he used it as a weapon, but since he had forgotten his heavy jug he had to use his fist.

He hit Luke Smith on the mouth. Smith went backwards, trying to draw his gun. Evidently he had anticipated trouble, for he had strapped his gun-belt outside of his raincoat.

"Get him, Your Honor!"

Dimly Judge Bates heard Tobacco Jones' excited yelp. He was aware, also, that Mary was hollering. He had to act fast, or Smith would have his .45 in his hand. His second blow dropped Smith.

"Jump on him!" a townsman shouted. "We cain't have no gunplay with all these women an' children aroun'—"

Three men fairly leaped on the prone cattleman. One wrestled the .45 away from him. The gun went off once, but the lead screamed harmlessly upward. Judge Bates looked at Ed Lindbery with narrowed eyes.

His Honor rubbed his knuckles. His hand ached a little. "You got anything to say, Lindbery?"

Lindbery grinned crookedly. Outwardly he was easy-going, but the judge glimpsed the turmoil inside the lanky gunhand. "Not with a .45 on me," Lindbery grunted.

Judge Bates glanced at Tobacco Jones. The Cowtrail postmaster held

his .45 rigidly on Ed Lindbery. "Thanks, Tobacco," His Honor murmured.

Tobacco Jones grunted, "I'd do it even for you, judge."

Luke Smith, now disarmed, got slowly rubbing his mouth gingerly forced. "You hit fast, Bates," he said slowly rubbing his mouth gingerly with the back of a hairy hand. "But I don't figure this thing is finished, do you?" He might have been carrying on a conversation about the weather, his tone was that impersonal. Only his eyes betrayed his anger.

"Whatever you say," Judge Bates affirmed.

Their eyes met. Up to this moment there had been veiled animosity between this pair. Now that animosity had departed and in its place was a cold hate in the eyes of Cowman Luke Smith. This hate, though, was not in the eyes of Judge Lemanuel Bates, who had long before learned that hate was useless. Rather, in his judicial eyes was a sort of sorrow.

Smith read this, and it angered him fu.ther. He was the type of man who led others, either through brute force of strength or gun; yet, mingled with this element was a certain degree of craftiness—and over all this was a hardness, a toughness.

Mary Guthrie tugged at His Honor's sleeve. "Come on, Judge," she implored. "We've had enough troubles for one day."

"I agree with that." Tobacco Jones holstered his pistol.

The judge looked at Lindbery. His face was dead, lines drawn deep; his eyes were lifeless. Smith was being handed his .45 by a townsman who had unloaded it. His eyes were on His Honor.

Again Judge Lemanuel Bates got the feeling that he and Postmaster Tobacco Jones had barged in on a trap set by these two cowmen. But the trap, due to the judge's hard fists, had closed on Ed Lindbery and Bart Smith instead.

Mary Guthrie tugged again on his sleeve. "Let's go see Charlie," she said, and she was close to tears.

"All right," His Honor agreed.

2

HIS FACE being doctored by Doc Watson, Charlie Matthews lay in bed. Tobacco Jones chewed rough-cut; Mary Guthrie held Charlie's hand; Judge Bates sat on a chair. "How bad is he hurt, Doc?" the jurist asked.

Doc Watson put some ointment on the young man's face. "Got some burns on his forearms, judge. You can see the ones on his face. He's lucky to get out with so little damage."

Bates nodded. He spoke to the young pharmacist. "What happened, Charlie?"

The youth spoke with apparent difficulty. "I was mixing one of Doc's prescriptions. Then the whole caboodle just blew up in my face. You know, it blew me out the door, it hit so hard. I still figure that if it had blown me against the wall it would have flattened me. By luck I got knocked out the door, which was open."

Judge Bates looked at Watson. "Fixing one of your prescriptions, eh? What do you feed your victims now, Doc—powdered dynamite with caps and fuses for a chaser?"

The medico had a puzzled look. "What prescription was that, Charlie?"

"The one you left lying on my desk when I was over to the Mercantile buying some groceries this morning."

Judge Bates saw that the look of puzzlement on Watson's kindly face was even more apparent. "But I left no prescription on your desk this morning," the medico said. "I haven't given you a prescription to fill for three or four days."

Charlie Matthews looked at Watson. "Are you trying to stuff me, Doc? If you didn't leave it there, who did?" He answered his own question. "You're the only medico in Cowtrail —only one around for a hundred miles or so. Well, I mixed it—and *boom*—"

Doc Watson looked at Bates. "Something is awful crazy here. Your Honor; I left him no prescription."

Judge Bates spoke to the pharmacist. "You found a prescription on your desk, and you figured it had been left there by Doc; you started to fill it and then it exploded."

Matthews nodded. He stared at the medico. "Are you—are you—telling me the truth, Doc?"

"The gospel truth, Charlie."

Charlie stared from Mary to Tobacco Jones. His eyes took in Doc Watson and Judge Lemanuel Bates. "Somebody tried to get me to kill myself," he said in a tough voice. "But who on this range knows anything about chemistry?"

Bates asked, "Have you got the prescription?"

"I put it in my shirt pocket. The prescription didn't look right to me, so I mixed it in half quantities. It started to fume and I put the prescription in my pocket and then— Well, you know the rest."

"Where is his shirt?" Judge Bates asked.

Doc Watson said, "Hanging in the closet."

The judge started for the closet. At this moment the door opened and Luke Smith came in, trailed by Ed Lindbery. Judge Bates noticed that Smith's lips were swollen and he figured they would swell even more.

"How is he, Doc?" the Circle Diamond man asked.

Watson said, "Didn't the landlady stop you out in the hall and tell you nobody else could come into this room, Smith?" He had a hostile edge to his voice. "This man needs rest."

Luke Smith grinned, looking at Charlie Matthews. Ed Lindbery looked at Tobacco, then let his dead-pan eyes go to Judge Bates before looking back at Charlie. "I got a sick critter I want him to look at," the Circle Diamond owner said. "Looks like mebbe she's et loco weed."

"He can't travel," the doctor said. "Bring your cow into the hotel so he can look at her, eh?"

Smith was cynical. "Right funny, sawbones." He spoke to Matthews. "Sure would like to have you come out to doctor the critter."

CHARLIE spoke with difficulty because of his bandages. "The other day you said you'd shoot me if I set foot on Circle Diamond range. Mebbe your memory has taken a sudden turn for forgetting?"

"You heard me wrong," Smith said. "I never give no order that-a-way. I only said you'd be better off if you stuck with me—bein' as I own more cattle than them farmers—an' got money to pay you for doctorin' sick stock, which is somethin' most of them farmers cain't do."

Judge Bates listened.

Tobacco Jones chewed and spat in the spittoon. Tobacco watched Ed Lindbery. Bates figured that Tobacco was a little jealous. He, Judge Bates, had knocked down Luke Smith. Tobacco did not like Smith...nor did he like Lindbery.

Tobacco looked at Bates, his eyes mournfully solemn. "The door behin' you unlocked, Bates?" the postmaster whispered.

The door led to the adjoining room. Judge Bates had an inkling as to what Tobacco planned, but he was not sure what constituted his partner's contemplated action. Sometimes the postmaster was a hard gent to decipher. One minute he might be thoroughly dumb; the next moment he might be brilliant.

The judge opened the door a little.

Ed Lindbery watched with heavy eyes. Tobacco Jones suddenly dug in a pocket. He tried all his pockets. "Done run outa eatin' terbaccer," he told the world at large. "Gotta git some afore I do any thinkin'."

He left, boots moving down the hall.

Bates knew that his partner had not run out of chewing tobacco; on the way into the hotel he had seen Tobacco Jones transfer a fresh plug from one pocket to the other. His Honor returned his attention to Luke Smith.

Smith said, "Well, sorry you cain't doctor my cow, Matthews." Then to Ed Lindbery, "Come on, Ed."

Smith sent a sudden glance at Judge Bates.

"Your jaws," His Honor said, "must be pretty touchy, eh, Smith?"

SMITH BRISTLED like a dog looking at a porcupine. "They're *my* jaws, Bates," he growled. For a moment it looked as if the dog would tackle the porcupine. Then memory came in and told him about the porky's tough quills.

The cowmen left, boots making harsh noises. Judge Bates went to the door and glanced out. The landlady, on guard against further nuisances, saw His Honor and, having a crush on him, she came toward him, smiling widely. She moved the way a cow walks—waddling, lumbersome. Judge Bates smiled, and this pleased her, for she smiled back. She thought he was looking at her. He was not; he was looking at the retreating backs of Bart Smith and Ed Lindbery going down the hall.

Because her back was to the cowmen, the landlady did not see what happened. Judges Bates saw it clearly.

Smith walked ahead, as usual, swaggering, blustering, tough. Behind him trooped the gaunt gunman Ed Lindbery. Just as Smith turned the corner, the door to a room opened, directly back of Lindbery.

Judge Bates saw the upward flash of a six-shooter barrel. He saw the barrel come down on Ed Lindbery's head. He saw Lindbery slump, fall to the carpet. Then the hand—and the six-shooter—had ducked back into the room. The door was closed. And Luke Smith, stunned and surprised, was kneeling beside his unconscious gunman.

"What in the name of—?"

The landlady, upon hearing Smith's curses, turned. "Why, what happened—did he trip himself?"

"We better go see," Judge Bates said, trying to hide his grin.

Smith jerked open the door to the room behind the prone gunman. When the judge and landlady came on the scene Luke Smith barged out of the room, eyes dark with anger and puzzlement.

"What happened?" the landlady asked.

Smith could hardly speak, he was so mad. "Somebody slugged my pal. Knocked him cold, he did. I was goin' aroun' the corner when I heard the *crack,* and when I got back you two was the only ones in the hall!" He had his anger under better control now. "Did you two see who did it?"

"I saw nobody but you two," the surprised landlady said.

Judge Bates said, "I saw Lindbery fall. Nobody hit him, though; he just went down like he'd been shot through the heart. Does he have heart trouble?"

"Heart trouble!" Smith almost jumped in anger. "Nothin' bothers him! A louse could bite him an' the louse would break his jaws, Lindbery's hide is thet tough. I thought somebody might've hid in the room an' slugged him."

"He never got slugged," Judge

Bates said. "He went down of his own accord; I saw it, Smith."

Luke Smith was on his knees beside the unconscious gunman. "If he never got slugged how come he get this bump on his cranium?" He explored the wound with the same gingerness that a new mother feels of a baby's diaper.

"He might've bumped his head against the chair yonderly," His Honor said.

Smith said, "Send down Doc Watson."

THE JUDGE returned to Matthews' room, and Watson went to where Lindbery lay. The door to the other room opened and Tobacco Jones came in, grinning like a skunk who had just raided a chicken coop. "How did it turn out, Bates?"

"You accomplished your mission, Tobacco."

Tobacco bit off a chew. "Had to git outa thet room fast. Traveled along the roof of the Merc, then went into the room adjoining this. He went down fast, eh?"

Mary Guthrie asked, "What are you two talking about?"

Charlie Matthews repeated, "Yeah, what *are* you two talking about?"

Judge Bates grinned. "Someday we'll tell you folks." Suddenly he was all business. "Now let me see that prescription, Charlie."

Bates read the ingredients off the prescription. It was written on one of Doc Watson's prescription forms, with the medico's letterhead on the paper. His Honor saw that the prescription was written in Latin. He stumbled through the words, and then handed it back to the young druggist.

"You put it in American, Charlie?"

Charlie translated: "Nitric acid, 3½ ounces. Tincture of metaphen, 1 dram. Glycerin, 12 ounces. Oil of peppermint, 15 minnims. Sulphuric acid, 4 drams."

Tobacco scowled, chewed. "All Greek to me," he said.

"Latin, not Greek," His Honor said. "Here comes Doc."

With the medico was lanky Sheriff Whiting. Both had a report to make. Whiting had carefully scouted around the remains of the drugstore but had found no trace of a fuse or a stick of blasted dynamite. Judge Bates nodded. Sheriff Whiting, he had often said, had good legs, but the Lord had overlooked giving him a strong brain. The judge told him to return to the scene of destruction and look again. This Whiting did, for the county judge —his boss—had so ordered.

Charlie read the list of ingredients to the medico, who had sent lanky Ed Lindbery on his way, the possessor of a splitting headache.

"I never gave you that prescription," Doc Watson maintained. "Hell, Charlie, that's the prescription for nitro-glycerin!" He looked at the paper. "My letterhead, and it must've been stolen from my office—but that isn't my writing. Here, I'll write out *nitric acid* for you, and then compare the writing."

"We believe you," Judge Bates said.

Nevertheless the medico went to the table, took a pencil out of his coat pocket, and did some writing on the paper. Outside the cold spring rain ran down the window.

Charlie said, "What got me was the addition of metaphen." The druggist spoke with difficulty around bandages. "Also, why the oil of peppermint?

They must've been added to throw me off-track; they aren't part of nitro. When I saw they should be added, I got to thinking maybe the reaction would kill the nitro effect— But when it started to fume—this boy started for the door!"

Doc Watson returned with his writing. The judge said, "You sure never wrote out that prescription." Tobacco, also comparing the writing, nodded affirmation.

"I go out a lot and leave my office, unlocked," the docor said. "Somebody has stolen a sheet from one of my prescription pads. But who around here knows chemistry and Latin?"

"You got me," His Honor admitted.

Tobacco Jones shifted his chew. "Who you got selected for pet enemies, Charlie?"

"Smith and Lindbery, I'd say."

TOBACCO JONES looked at Judge Bates. Their eyes held the same information: this was dirty, diabolical and blood thirsty. Charlie had a point when admitting Smith and Lindbery hated him.

Loco weed was poisoning the farmers' cattle; young Charlie Matthews was doctoring these sick cattle. To the best of Judge Lemanuel Bates' knowledge, there had never been loco weed on Cowtrail range before. Now cattle and calves were dying from the disease caused by the prairie flower.

So far, from what Bates had learned, the disease had not hit the Smith Circle Diamond herds. Smith claimed the cattle were immune to the weed because they had eaten it down in Texas before being trailed north into Wyoming. Judge Bates had discreetly kept hands off the entire affair, leaving it to Matthews. Meanwhile he had dug into his library books and had read up on loco weed. According to his veterinary book, there was no cure for the disease.

Judge Bates asked. "Did you ever find any loco weed on this range, Charlie?"

"Never. Not a spear of it."

Bates nodded, said to Watson, "Keep him in bed, Doc." Then, with a nod to Mary, he said to Tobacco Jones, "Come on, pard."

Charlie asked, "Where you going—and what do you aim to do, Your Honor?"

"Aim to do?" Judge Bates' wide face held a look of surprise. "Why, this is a matter for Sheriff Whiting to decide, not me. And as for where I am going—I'm going back to my office, put my boots on my desk, and resume my nap." His Honor paused, one hand on the doorknob. "Why ask such questions, Charlie?"

"This is my trouble," the druggist said, "and I aim to settle it myself."

"That's good. Do it within the confines of the law, though, or you end up facing me in my court, son."

With this advice, His Honor departed. Tobacco Jones, chuckling around a chew, said, "You sure don't foller your own advice, judge."

"What do you mean?"

"You step outside the law, you say; if *you* can do it, why can't Charlie an' other people?"

Judge Bates looked shocked. "How can you, my partner, say such a thing, Jones! Saying a judge is breaking laws is a serious charge, Postmaster!"

"Ah, forget it, Bates. That hot air might work with somebody who don't know you like I do, but it don't cut no mustard with me. You're jes' about like a big dill pickle. You bite into a dill pickle an' you never know what way the juice will squirt. Where to now— What the hell is wrong with that farmer?"

The man had roared into town and had dismounted in front of the wrecked drugstore. He had climbed off a panting old horse that he had ridden bareback. Evidently the nag was a work horse for the judge saw collar-marks on his shoulders.

"What's the trouble, Maddox?" His Honor asked.

"Where's Charlie? What happened to his store?"

Judge Bates roughly told of the explosion.

Maddox swore. "Then two hellions of a Lindbery an' Bart Smith—they're behin' this! Charlie an' me is good friends. Charlie was workin' on a vaccine against locoweed. Locoweed disease is runnin' us farmers outa this Cowtrail country. Three of my heifers is down now—thet's why I come in to see Charlie."

Judge Bates told him, "Only thing you can do is drench your stock with warm water and some salt. Locoweed affects the nerves, and the only thing a man can do is clean out the animal—"

"What do you know about it! You're no vet—you're a judge!"

Clint Maddox hurried toward the hotel, leaving his panting horse reintied in the street. Judge Bates glanced at the man's back and shrugged. "Smart gent," he said.

"Look!" Tobacco Jones' voice held a startled note. Luke Smith had come out of the *Lone Dice Saloon* and had stopped the farmer in front of the hotel. Judge Bates saw that Ed Lindbery stood in the doorway of the saloon, back out of the rain. Lindbery looked at His Honor briefly, then returned his gaze to his boss and the farmer.

Judge Bates heard Smith say, "What's the matter, Maddox?"

Maddox had stopped, legs spread wide. "My cattle are dying from locoweed, Smith. And it seems danged odd to me that only the stock belongin' to us farmers has the disease—none of your cows has it!"

"You lie, farmer!"

"Don't call me a liar. I ain't never seen one of your cows sick with loco disease!"

"You haven't ridden my range."

"That's because you won't let us hoemen ride acrost your grass an' inspect your cattle. You give us orders to stay off Circle Diamond grass."

"And them orders stand," Luke said tersely. "And I don't like the way you throw around accusations against me, farmer; you open your mouth against me again and I'll work you over!"

"You ain't man enough, Smith!"

The two men eyed each other. The farmer was wild with rage; Smith, though, was coldly tough.

"Smith'll kill him," Tobacco Jones croaked.

Judge Bates shook his leonine head, rain dripping off his rain-helmet. "Maddox doesn't pack a pistol, Jones, and Smith wouldn't dare shoot an unarmed man. You know, I believe that farmer is going to learn something, and learn it right fast."

"An' what'll thet be, Bates?"

"These farmers are all from the midwest and east. They have spent their lives under a strong cover of law and order; therefore they don't really know how tough Smith and Lindbery are. So far, no actual violence has taken place, but I believe that will soon happen—"

"It *is* happening," Tobacco Jones grunted.

Maddox had again challenged Smith. He had expected Smith to use his fists. Luke Smith did not run true to form; Smith used his .45 as a club. When it was all over Maddox was sitting on the plank sidewalk, stunned and beaten, with blood running down his face.

Smith stepped back, wiped his gun barrel on his chaps, and said, "That'll teach you to watch your tongue, farmer!"

Sheriff Whiting came running. Judge Bates said, "He can handle it, Tobacco," and he went toward the barn behind his office, with the postmaster following. First, they went into the office, where the judge got his jug. Shaking it he judged it, about three-quarters full. He took a long drag and corked the jug.

"Get your rifles off the rack, Tobacco. See that we have ammunition for them and for our short guns. I'll go out and saddle our cayuses."

"You're sure strong with the orders today," the postmaster grunted, crossing the warm room toward the two

Winchester .30-30s hanging on the horns of the elkhorn gun-rack.

Smiling, Judge Bates went outside, carrying his jug.

3

RAIN RAN off the eaves of the barn. Maddox was a bachelor, so there were no occupants of the farmhouse which stood about fifty yards from the barn. Both of the buildings were made of native pine logs.

Judge Bates stood beside a jersey heifer tied in a stall. He looked closely at her eyes.

"You so hard up for female company, Bates, thet you have to make moon eyes at a heifer?"

Judge Bates stepped back. "Don't rub my hide the wrong way, Tobacco. I was checking on her eyes—they're glassy, and her vision is defective. One of the traits of locoweed, so the book says."

"What book?"

"My book on veterinary work."

"Never knew you had a book like that," the postmaster grumbled. "What are some of the other symptoms?"

"Lead her out of the stall, please."

The postmaster untied the heifer's halter-rope and led her outside. She walked slowly, her eyes glassy and mean, but she seemed to lift her hoofs extraordinarily high—as though, with each step, she was stepping over a low fence.

"She's got all that the book says," His Honor grunted. "It acts like dope on cattle. Makes them lift their feet high; their judgment of distance is bad, due to their faulty vision."

Tobacco Jones bit off a chew. "What can we do to help her?"

"Nothing that I know of—except drench her, in hopes of getting the poison out of her belly; but some has got into the blood, and there is nothing we can do about that. She might live, she might die. If she is going to die, she'll get thin and weak, and finally, just kick the bucket."

Tobacco Jones re-tied the heifer to the manger. His jaws worked as if he had a grudge against his chew. "Bates, this don't make logic. They ain't been no locoweed on this range afore these farmers come in. Did it come in with some hay they shipped in?"

"They haven't shipped in any hay; they've cut hay and fed native grass, Charlie and I were discussing that possibility the other day, and we both were forced to throw the idea into the discard."

"But this cow—an' the rest of this stock—has et loco weed. Let's look at Maddox's haystacks."

"He has none; he fed all his hay last winter. Charlie and I have agreed that these cattle get this weed out on spring grass."

"Then let's look over his pasture, eh?"

They had led their broncs into the barn to get them out of the rain. Therefore, when the Circle Diamond man rode up he did not see their horses and undoubtedly he thought the farm was without a human around. He rode bravely to the door and he was dismounting when the judge saw him through the door of the barn.

At that moment, the postmaster saw the man, too. "Thet's Smoky Anderson, one of Luke Smith's hands, ain't it, Bates?"

"Sure is."

"What the hell is he doin' here? He was around town when he left there; he's rid right out here from town."

Judge Bates nodded, eyes wary. "He's going into the house, Tobacco. Bold as a daylight robber, he is. Just walks in, and a man would swear he owned the spread. Reckon Maddox left in such a hurry he forgot even to lock his house door."

"What does Anderson aim to do inside?"

"That," said the judge, "is just what I aim to find out."

They ran across the clearing. Tobacco Jones slid in mud, almost falling. But he kept his equilibrium, to sidle in beside the judge to the left of the open door. From inside came the crash of furniture breaking.

Smoky Anderson was a fast worker. Within a few minutes, he backed out of the door.

Judge Bates' rifle-barrel came down.

Smoky Anderson never knew what—or who—had hit him. He went backwards, stumbled in the mud, and lay on his back about thirty feet from the farm-shack. By now smoke came out of the house.

Tobacco Jones grunted, "He come over here to set the spread on fire while Maddox is in town, Bates! Smith has sent him out—"

SMOKE POURED out the door. It belched out the open windows. Judge Bates realized that Anderson had found a kerosene can inside and had apparently jetted the explosive kerosene around the room.

Judge Bates took one step into the house. He came out coughing and with streaming eyes. "We can do nothing, Jones."

The smoke drove Tobacco back, too. "We'd better drag this son outa the way," the postmaster grunted. "We don't want him to burn up, Bates."

"Makes no never mind."

Tobacco grinned, "I'd do that much for a skunk, Bates." He grabbed the two limp arms of the unconscious Circle Diamond man and dragged him beyond reach of the fire; by now the house was burning merrily.

"Nothing we can do," His Honor said, leading his bronc out of the barn and mounting. "Rain should keep the fire localized on the house, I'd say."

Tobacco also mounted. "What about Anderson?"

Judge Bates shrugged. "Let him sleep in peace, Jones. He'll never know what happened to him, or who slugged him. He should have kept his eyes open; if he had, he could have seen us leave town for this place."

"He sure took too much for granted," the postmaster allowed, spitting a brown stream of tobacco across the unconscious man's homely face.

"We got some riding to do," Judge Bates said.

●

Ocassionally the rain stopped. Judge Bates and Tobacco Jones rode across the pasture wherein Maddox's sick animals had been confined. The judge had a good idea what locoweed looked like, for his veterinary book had contained a picture of the poisonous weed. But he and Tobacco Jones found no such weed in the pasture.

A farmer named Max Thompson, loped over, hollering, "Maddox's house is on fire, men!"

Feigning surprise, the judge turned in saddle, looking at the burning house. "Well, I'll be dog-gonned—it is on fire! But it looks too far gone to have us try to put it out, eh?"

"I'll lopin' over there!" Thompson hollered.

Rain swept in, cold and strong, and the farmer spurred ahead. Judge Bates straightened in saddle, cold in the bones. "No locoweed here that we can see, Tobacco."

"None growing, Bates."

The judge blew rain off his wide nose. "That means then that those sick cattle were given some feed that contained locoweed. And unless I'm plumb addled, that feed was administered to them by either Luke Smith or Ed Lindbery—or some of their hands."

"Where would they get locoweed from?"

"Ship it in, maybe." The judge turned his mount. "Thompson will find Anderson. He'll drag him into town to Sheriff Whiting. That should tie up Smith and Lindbery in town for a spell."

"What you thinkin' about, Bates?"

"The nice fire in my office, warming that pot-bellied stove. My feet on

the desk and me in my chair—all dry and comfortable." Again His Honor blasted rain from off his nose.

"More'n that, Bates. I know you an' you got a gleam in your eye that makes lightnin' hang fire by comparison."

"Good grub-worms!" His Honor grunted. "You're getting poetic, Jones. . . .Hmm. Somebody stole one of Doc Watson's prescription pads. Somebody knows how to make nitroglycerin. Somebody can write in Latin."

"Who would that be?"

"Analyze it down, Tobacco. Anybody could steal one of the pads, for Doc always leaves his office unlocked. Anybody could look up in a book how to make nitro. But nobody knows Latin."

"Somebody must."

"You got me wrong," His Honor said. "When a person knows Latin, it means he has had a good education—or better than average education."

"Couldn't he look that up in a book, too?"

The judge nodded. "Come to think of it, Tobacco, I reckon he could." He grinned a little, but his partner did not see the grin. Bates had deliberately led Tobacco Jones around to the recognition of this fact. Occasionally he fed Tobacco's pride and ego. This was one of those rare times.

"All we gotta find," said Tobacco Jones, biting off a chew, "is who has a book on chemistry an' Latin. An' find it—has the Latin in it for the chemicals, too."

"But where is this locoweed coming from?" His Honor asked.

Tobacco spat hugely. "Texas has a lot of locoweed, they tell me. An' unless my memory serves me bad both Luke Smith and Ed Lindbery came from Texas. Hey, where we ridin' for, Bates?"

"The Circle Diamond."

The Cowtrail partners were correct on one angle: they figured that most of the Circle Diamond riders would be out on calf roundup. Still, His Honor stated, Luke Smith and Ed Lindbery were not fools; if they had anything to hide at the Circle Diamond, they would have a guard posted. Accordingly, the partners tied their broncs in the willows down along Bullhead Creek, now swollen and muddy from the rain. Then, carrying rifles, they went ahead on foot.

WITHIN A few moments they were in the underbrush back of the ranch-house, a rambling log building. Beyond the house were the usual buildings: two log barns, a log bunkhouse and cookshack, three big pine-pole corrals. The windmill, fan shut off, loafed in the rain, overlooking the buildings.

"Wonder if they got any dogs," Tobacco Jones said.

Judge Bates shook his head. "Got some coyote-hounds, but they're out with the hunter, I suppose. He's trapping over around Stinking Butte, I understand; coyotes have been killing spring calves."

"Smith hires a hunter all the year around, I understand."

"He's a good cowman," His Honor grudgingly admitted. "He's got some guinea hens they tell me; uses 'em for watchdogs. Old Texas idea. Guinea hens are better than watchdogs; Texans used them to warn them redskins were sneaking up."

"They ain't cackled yet, Bates."

"They won't on a rainy day like this. Bet right now they're roosting back in the thick cottonwoods along the creek. Guinea hens are no 'count on a rainy day, they tell me."

The judge was right on this point. They scouted the brush and found the guard. He was sitting in a small leanto made of canvas strung between two young saplings. The partners could not find another guard. Evidently the Circle Diamond held the fighting abilities of the farmers in small concern, for only one guard was posted. That apparently left only the old roustabout on the spread, and he would be dozing in the bunkhouse, His Honor figured. Tobacco Jones went out to verify this fact and came back chuckling.

"Looked in the bunkhouse window, Bates. Ol' fellow sound asleep, mouth open to catch flies."

"Anybody else on the premises?"

"Not thet I could see."

Judge Bates eyed the back door. "Here we go," he said. He scurried across the grassy clearing with Tobacco jumping on his spurs. But the guard did not see them, for no shots came. They had the ranch-house between them and the guard; also, the bunkhouse was beyond the ranch-house, too.

Brazenly they entered the kitchen. Dishes needed washing; dirty pots and pans were on the stove and the table; the place did not possess too healthy an odor. The judge went into the living room, followed by Tobacco Jones. "You dido down that hall, Jones, and I'll go down this one."

The two hallways led to bedrooms. Three of them were empty, dust on the floor, and the fourth held two single bunks, complete with dirty and vile-smelling blankets. Judge Bates knew that both Smith and Lindbery were bachelors; a stranger had only to look at their housekeeping efforts to verify this fact.

"Nobody in them two rooms, Bates."

"Only us in the house. Now, there's a bunch of books over there on those shelves. Let's give them a look."

"Wish I knew where they kept their correspondence." Tobacco Jones looked at the safe in the corner. "Wish I could spring that box, but I'm no safe-cracker. And I'll bet only two men know the combination."

"Maybe only one. Lindbery is only a hired hand."

"Hired gunman," Tobacco Jones grunted in correction. He went over to the safe and fooled with the dial. The judge ran his gaze over the row of books. Two were veterinary books, and when he opened them they had string markers in them pointing to the sections dealing with locoweed.

He nodded.

Tobacco Jones came close. "No use me fightin' thet safe, Bates. Can't open it. What'd you find?"

"Two books on vet science, open to locoweed. Then this book on chemistry—looks like it might be an engineer's book—oil engineer."

"Got them Eyetalian names in it?"

"You mean Latin? Yes, it has them. Well, we know now who wrote the prescription."

"Let's pinch them, Bates. You're county-judge—you can make the arrest. The charge would be attempted murder against the person of Charlie Matthews."

"This evidence won't hold in court."

"It would in yore court."

The judge shook his head. "I couldn't step that far out of judicial procedure; we got to find some locoweed on the premises."

Tobacco Jones straightened, head cocked as he listened. "Footsteps ap-

proaching," he hissed. "The back door—the guard—"

THEY DUCKED down the hall and slid into a bedroom. The boots went into the living room, then into the hall. They stopped in front of the door. The door opened, a homely head came inside, but the judge and his partner had gone into the next bedroom through the adjoining door. The guard went to this room, looked into it, but by that time the Cowtrail pair was in the first bedroom, the door closed between the two rooms.

The guard shuffled his boots. Tobacco Jones held his breath, and Judge Bates listened, head at an angle.

The guard hesitated, then walked slowly down the hall. After a while they heard the screen door slam on the back door.

"We gotta git outa here, Bates. If Lindbery an' Smith come in—find us in their house— Hades, they could shoot us in cold blood, claimin' robbery!"

"We go to the barn, Tobacco."

"Look for locoweed, eh?"

They reached the bunkhouse unchallenged. They went from there to the barn. They were just entering the barn when the guard spied them. "Hey, roustabout, that you goin' into the barn?"

Judge Bates held his voice down low. "Sure is, guard." He spoke from inside the barn.

"Who's the gent with you?"

"You blind, you fool!" Judge Bates still disguised his voice. "Smoky Anderson is with me!"

There was silence. Then the guard hollered, "I'm comin' in! Anderson is supposed to be in town— Nobody has rid in past me—"

"We gotta get out of here!" Tobacco Jones spoke hoarsely.

The judge, eye to a crack in the wall, watched the guard advance—he was a thick-bodied bowlegged son of the saddle. Rifle under his arm, he ambled across the clearing. At this moment the door of the bunkhouse opened and the old roustabout stuck out his scraggly head. "You holler to me, guard?"

The guard stopped. "I thought you just went into the barn. You hollered to me— Hey, there's somethin' wrong here!"

Judge Bates stepped back. "He's running this way, Jones. We could pick him off but we'd have a robbery charge against us, along with— What you aim to do?"

Tobacco Jones shot from a window. Two rifle bullets plowed mud in front of the guard, who turned and ran for the bunkhouse. Tobacco Jones placed two more rifle bullets behind the man's spurs so close that they threw mud on his boots. The guard fairly dived into the bunkhouse.

"Get out of here, Jones!"

They ran out the rear door, the judge in the lead. Within minutes, they were in saddle, loping toward Cowtrail.

"We ain't found no locoweed yet," Tobacco Jones grunted, blowing rain from his lips. "An' we gotta find thet, Bates, afore we have a case here."

"That's right."

WHEN THEY reached Cowtrail the rain was even more cold and more miserable. The judge dismounted by the new depot and went inside, Tobacco Jones trailing him and grumbling. "What we do here, Bates?"

"You watch."

The judge had an earnest, although short, talk with the operator. They even checked freight and express records. The railroad had not been in operation long, and therefore there were not many records to check.

"Nothin' came in to the Circle Diamond from Texas, eh?" Tobacco Jones

asked, catching the significance of the visit.

"Not to this depot," the greenshade said. "We got records of where each bundle and shipment come from an' who it was for."

The judge thanked the agent, then swore him to eternal secrecy. The jug rose and fell twice. Then the partners were out in the cold rain again. Judge Bates glanced at the hotel and said, "Poor kid. They aimed to kill him, they did."

" 'Roun' an' 'roun'," Tobacco Jones grunted. "Two sliding balls on the roulette game of locoweed."

Judge Bates smiled. "Never know you had that much poetry in you, Jones. You're like my sixth wife—each day she had some surprise for me."

"You ain't never even been hitched, Bates!"

Doc Watson had kept Maddox in town for observation for Bart Smith had pistol whipped him rather efficiently. The farmer paced a hotel room, demanding that he be released so he could shoot down Smith and Lindbery. Sheriff Whiting wiped his forehead and almost whined. "Maddox get loose, judge, an' they'll kill him!"

"Put him in jail," His Honor said.

"Kin I do that legally?" Whiting's hangdog face lighted with new hope. "Will you issue a warrant for his incarceration?"

"My gosh," the judge marveled. "Where did you learn such a big word?"

Sheriff Whiting waited no longer. Grabbing the farmer by the collar, he steered him toward the jail, with Maddox protesting.

"Judge, do somethin' for me," the farmer pleaded.

"We're doing the best for you that we can. If you challenge Smith and Lindbery they'll kill you. I'll fix out a warrant later, sheriff."

"Okay."

They went up to Charlie Matthews' room where they found Mary Guthrie reading to the druggist. Judge Bates speared a chair, balanced his bulk on it. Tobacco Jones chewed and admired Mary's dark hair.

"How much locoweed does it take to make a cow loco?" His Honor asked.

The druggist studied him. "About a handful. Why ask?"

"Will a cow eat it after it's cut?"

The pharmacist shook his bandaged-wrapped head. "She has to eat it with grass, by accident; she won't eat it deliberately."

"What if it is camouflaged?"

"What are you driving at, judge?"

"Answer my question, young man."

Charlie said, "I guess a cow would eat it if it was soaked in—well, say it was soaked in sorghum, or something sweet that a cow liked. What's on your mind, judge?"

Judge Bates winked at Mary. "A pretty girl," he said.

He and Tobacco Jones left. Luke Smith and Ed Lindbery came out of the saloon. Smith said, "Done heard the druggist has warned the farmers not to let their stock out on pasture."

Judge Bates nodded.

Smith continued with, "Every spear of grass the farmers' cows an' stock eat, so they tell me, will be mowed by hand with a hand-sickle, inspected for locoweed, and then fed the critters."

"You know more about it than I do," His Honor fabricated.

Ed Lindbery, as usual, had his hand on his holstered gun. The killer's face was taut and ugly. Years on the Bench had convinced Judge Lemanuel Bates that some men should be killed to protect innocent society. Lindbery was one of this caliber; the man who killed him would be doing other men a good turn.

The judge looked at Luke Smith. Smith spoke easily, "One of my men jes' rode into town. Tol' me some prowlers were around the Circle Diamond. You two men rode from that direction a spell back."

Tobacco Jones opened his mouth, but said nothing when the judge waved his hand for silence. "You ac-

cusing us, Smith?" His Honor asked.

"Stating a fact, Bates."

Judge Bates said, "You need evidence."

Smith countered with, "So do you."

Hidden currents of meaning underlined their seemingly meaningless conversation. Judge Bates realized Smith was no fool. He also realized, more than ever now, that Smith would die for his cattle, for the Circle Diamond. When the time came for a showdown—if it did come—it would be roaring guns.

But this was not the place...or the time.

"I might get that evidence," His Honor assured. "Come on, partner."

Once Tobacco Jones glanced back. "They're watchin' us, Bates. We got them on the run..."

"Glad you think so," His Honor said dully.

THE TOWN of Cowtrail, at that time, was the end of the railroad, for it had not yet built over the Tetons into Utah. About thirty miles east of Cowtrail is the town of Buffalo Bend, and it was to this town that Judge Bates and Tobacco Jones rode that night.

Rain fell continuously.

"Where t'hell are we going, Bates?"

"Buffalo Bend, of course."

Tobacco Jones was wet to the skin. His boots were half-filled with water. Even his eating-tobacco was sopping wet. He felt as miserable as a hen who has hatched out a bunch of goose eggs. "Why, Bates?"

The jurist turned on one stirrup, glancing at his partner. Dawn was coloring the sky slightly despite the heavy rain clouds. "For Charlie Matthews' sake, Tobacco. For our own sake, too—no two-bit cowdog is putting the run on Judge Lem Bates."

"Nor on Tobacco Jones, either. Them things is to be taken for granted, Bates. But why to Buffalo Bend?"

"They ship freight into there, too. The freight is unloaded there before it is unloaded at Cowtrail. Now we'll say, for instance, you have some freight coming in—and you want to keep it secret. Would you have it shipped to Cowtrail or Buffalo Bend?"

"The Bend, of course."

"So I figure, too."

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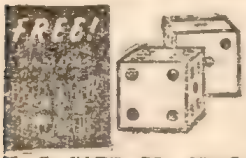

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The partners reached the town and ate in the *Spur and Bit Cafe*. His Honor, despite his coldness, joshed with the waitress, who eyed him with professional boredom. "I'm single," he informed her.

"Oh, I thought—" She got more congenial, then.

They ate and went outside. Tobacco Jones grumbled, "When they find out a man is single, they warm right up to him. They don't want love—they want a meal-ticket for the rest of their days."

"Women want security," the judge said. "Companionship, too—or so they say. Some call it slavery, though. Us to the depot."

They knew nobody in this town, for it was almost brand-new—having been built after the coming of rails. The judge had to show his credentials to the operator, and then they examined the bill-of-ladings for past shipments. Some had come from Texas, but none was addressed to either Luke Smith or Ed Lindbery.

"That settles that," Tobacco Jones mourned. "Thirty miles of ride—cold, wet, miserable. Maybe it comes in overland by pack train. Maybe they grow it in a hidden hot-house somewhere."

The judge smiled at that latter. "Neither of those two has green thumbs, Tobacco. Let's rest for a day or so, eh?"

"You an' thet waitress!"

THEY GOT a room at the hotel. For four days they haunted Buffalo Bend. The judge did not mind. The second night he took the waitress to the tent show. Her hand, somehow, got into his. Meanwhile, the fat woman who ran the hotel started to shine up to Tobacco Jones.

"She'll get you, Jones."

"Not me. I'll leave this country first."

"You shouldn't have told her you were an English millionaire, out here to buy a ranch. Haven't you any respect for yourself at all?"

[*Turn To Page* 124]

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"Bates, I never told her that— She don't even know my name. She thinks I'm named Oliver Case."

"Big deceitful liar," the judge mourned. "No wonder men have lost respect in the eyes of the gentler sex."

"Gentler!"

On the fourth day a barrel came in on the freight. It was from Lubbock, Texas, and it was addressed to one Jack McCartney of Buffalo Bend, Wyoming. It was a fifty-five gallon barrel and the judge tipped it, but there was not a liquid inside—for it did not gurgle.

Unseen by the operator, His Honor pried loose the plug on top. His judicial nose went down and he sniffed.

"Smells like molasses."

Tobacco Jones whiffed, too. Nose wrinkling speculatively, he agreed. They went back to the hotel and took the same room for another night.

The fat woman beamed. "I'm so glad you'll stay another night, Mr. Case," she said, smiling on Tobacco Jones, who shifted his chew.

"I am, too," he had to say, grudgingly.

From the window they could see the raw-new depot across the street. About ten o'clock the next morning a buckboard came into town and two men got out and loaded the barrel in the back.

Then they left town.

THE DAY was calm, the air was dry, and the sun beamed. The damp earth was shooting out green grass. Ed Lindbery, driving the team, leaned back on the high seat, and spoke to his companion. "What the hell became of Bates and Jones?"

Luke Smith, feeling the warm sun across his back, said, "Sure glad it quit raining. Oh, they prob'ly went out fishing—they duck out for a couple of weeks at a time, you know."

"I don't like it one bit," Lindbery scowled. "Looks odd to me. Here they was so interested in locoweed, an' then all of a sudden they disappear—"

The gunman did not finish.

[*Turn To Page* 126]

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Two men had come out of the high sagebrush. One was lanky, thin to a shadow, but the other was wide—blocky and big and tough-looking.

"Howdy, men," said Tobacco Jones.

Judge Bates said, "Well, fancy meeting you two sweet little things out here, miles from the Circle Diamond, out in this thick sagebrush."

Luke Smith had color in his face now. One quick glance showed him the partners carried shotguns. He glanced at his gunman. Ed Lindbery was himself, now—gaunt and savage and dead-pan.

Smith said, "What's the deal, Bates?"

The judge spoke slowly, eyes never leaving the two cowmen. "You've got a barrel in the back of your rig. It came to Buffalo Bend from Lubbock, down in Texas. You got relatives down there, Smith—or friends, anyway. Or is your name Jack McCartney now, Luke Smith?"

"A barrel of molasses," Smith snarled. "Jack McCartney is a gent who works for me. His folks sent him a barrel of sorghum scrapin's."

Judge Bates shook his head. "You're McCartney, Smith. That barrel contains locoweed soaked in molasses so the farmers' cows will eat it right off. A few handfuls of that, and a cow dies."

"You're crazy, Bates!"

Judge Bates let his shotgun droop slightly. Luke Smith noticed this, and color flared across his jowls; for a moment, the dead eyes of Ed Lindbery showed life, for Tobacco Jones had also let the barrel of his shotgun sag a little.

"We're taking you men—and that barrel—into Cowtrail, Smith. There, before the public eyes, we'll open it."

"You won't take us into town," Smith said. "You might take the barrel, but you won't take us—and I figure you'll be the ones toted in, feet first. Bates, we have to call each other, sooner or later, so here we are..."

"Your deal, Smith."

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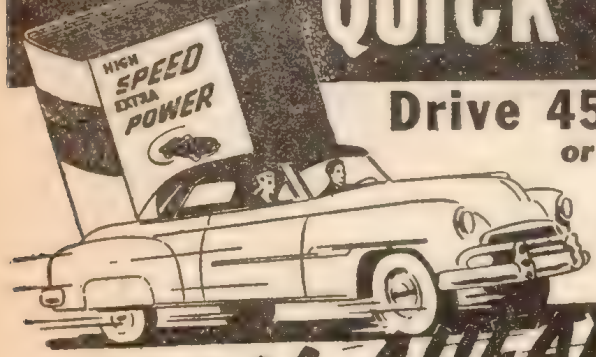

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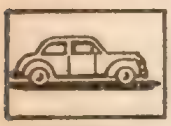

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Ed Lindbery shot, but the team, jerking the buckboard, threw his aim wide. Hard on the roar of his own shotgun, Judge Bates heard the sodden smash of Tobacco Jones' scattergun.

Smith left the buckboard, stood on his shoulders, then fell on his side. But Ed Lindbery stayed with the rig. The team ran away, traveled about a hundred yards in the road, then darted to the north. The buckboard caught on sagebrush; the reach broke; the team ran off, dragging the front wheels.

The barrel went one way; Ed Lindbery went the other.

Judge Bates looked at Tobacco Jones. "Did—did you stop one, friend?"

Tobacco choked, said, "I swallered my gol-darned chew, Bates!"

Judge Bates slapped him across the back so hard that the postmaster almost fell down. Within a half hour, they had two bodies jackknifed across the wagon-broncs, ready for the trip to Cowtrail.

"What'll we do with the barrel, Bates?"

They dragged the ruins of the buckboard close to the barrel, and set them both on fire. The molasses-soaked locoweed burned with great agility. Within half an hour the wagon and barrel and the barrel's contents were ashes.

His Honor sighed, "Be a lot of legal work ahead for me, Jones. Settle the estate of these two men, and I'll have to have a coroner's jury to affix their state of deaths— I'm coroner, you know."

"With you as coroner," Tobacco Jones said, grinning, "they'll never get us in jail, Bates."

"And no more poisoned cattle," Judge Lemanuel Bates said.

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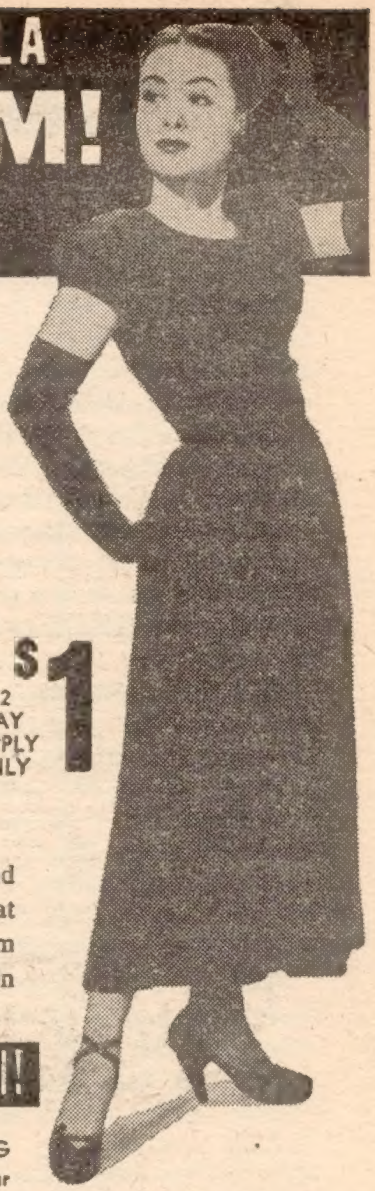

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THE REAL WEST

(continued from page 8)

When the fire had heated the stones so hot that to touch one would result in a very painful burn, the Indian mother would dip her finger into the cookie batter, deftly whirl a large gob of it around her fingertip and quickly etch the brilliantly colored stuff onto the hot rock. This maneuver had to be done by an experienced hand or else the dough would not spread out evenly, and if the finger got too close, it was likely to return to its owner in a charred state.

Indian children looked forward to piki much like modern children do to ice cream during hot summer days. Piki was a favorite among all Indians of all ages and in lieu of television the prehistoric Indian family unit used to sit around during the long winter evenings and munch batches of warm and brilliantly colored piki cookies.

The triad of Indian foodstuffs that were first tasted by white men when the Spaniards first came to the new world were corn, squashes and beans. These three are no means the only Indian contributions to gastronomic delight, but they are recognised by 'eminent authorities' on American Indians as major Indian contributions to world food stuffs. For that matter the list of Indian contributions to international dietary standards include more viands than we can name here, but which include such everyday staples as chili peppers, chocolate, coffee and many, many other things—painstakingly developed over the centuries by brilliant Indian agriculturists.

There were other foods, however, that required no cooking or preparations beyond securing them and while the sources and means of eating these things are included here it is strongly doubted that any readers will be stout hearted enough to try them.

Among Indian warriors, both prehistoric and comparatively modern, there was the neat habit of tearing the heart out of vanquished and brave enemies and consuming it raw. This fate almost befell General George A. Custer but was forbidden for fear that the whites would lionise the commander of the 7th Cavalry if the body was mutilated.

Then, too, there was the habit of eating raw buffalo hump. This practice didn't end until the buffalo became almost extinct. That is to say about 1885 or 1890.

However, as repellent as these practices may seem to white men, they were no less repulsive than the white frontiersmen's cute little contest where each white man would take the end of an uncooked buffalo intestine in his mouth and proceed to eat it raw as fast as he could before his competitor could get over half of it eaten himself. This contest was ordinarily accompanied by loud belches, streaks of blood and grease dripping onto the frontiersmen's buckskin shirt fronts, and myraid flies swarming around the men. Not infrequently one of the contestants would be forced to involuntarily disgorge what he had eaten and this, of course, was a cause for high glee among the betting spectators!

Well, whether a reader will feel sufficiently interested in old and modern frontier cookery or not, at least the staples of Western meals, prehistoric and contemporary are offered here should he feel so inclined Whether a try at making the bread of the old ones as well as piki is attempted or not, no one worth the name of "Westerner" should consider himself an authentic one until he has made up a sack of jerky and eaten it.

★

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You're horrified! You try to convince your wife, your friends, and the police that there was NOTHING between you. But Nan's room-mate points an accusing finger and says, *"Nan told me every sordid detail about you* . . . how you seduced her . . . how you promised to divorce your wife and marry her! *She killed herself because of you!"*

You listen — in SHOCKED AMAZEMENT! Then your maid is questioned. She says she found Nan Ordway in YOUR BED one morning, sleeping in YOUR WIFE'S pajamas! White with anger, your wife leaves you. Your friends desert you . . . and you begin to live in terrible fear of this dead girl who seemed determined to destroy you . . .

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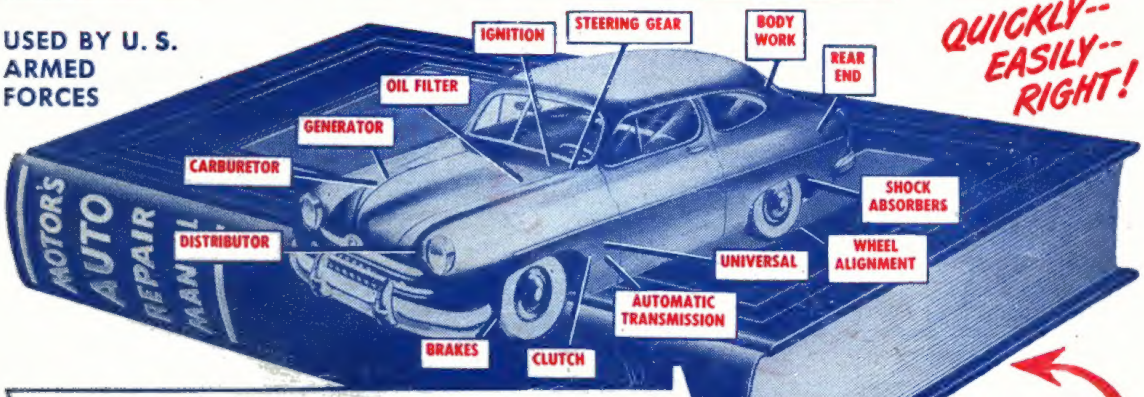

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